

FIRST LOOK AT **RATCHET & CLANK** FUTURE: A CRACK IN TIME

GAMEINFORMER

THE WORLD'S #1 VIDEO GAME MAGAZINE



ISSUE 195

JULY 2009

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

MAX PAYNE 3

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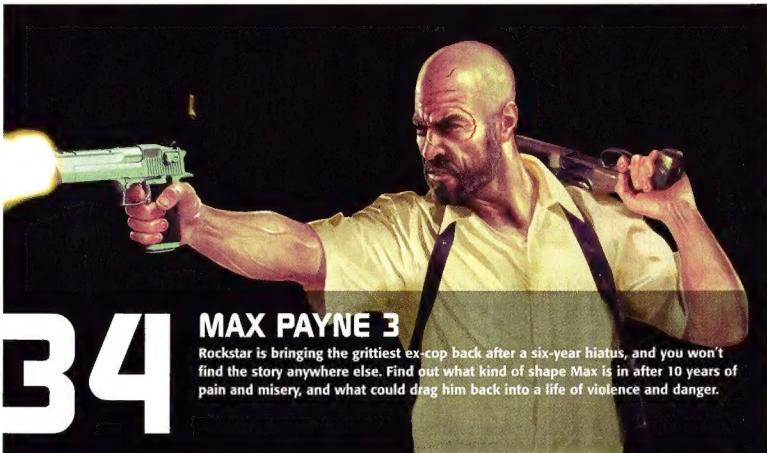
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Rockstar is bringing the grittiest ex-cop back after a six-year hiatus, and you won't find the story anywhere else. Find out what kind of shape Max is in after 10 years of pain and misery, and what could drag him back into a life of violence and danger.

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No game is perfect, but we can fantasize about one that is. We Frankenstein the ultimate role-playing game out of the best of the best.



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RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: A CRACK IN TIME

Robots and rodents save the day again in this gorgeous PS3 platformer. Swing on over for exclusive screenshots and details on Clank's new time-bending mechanic, Ratchet's expanded arsenal, and more.

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1



2

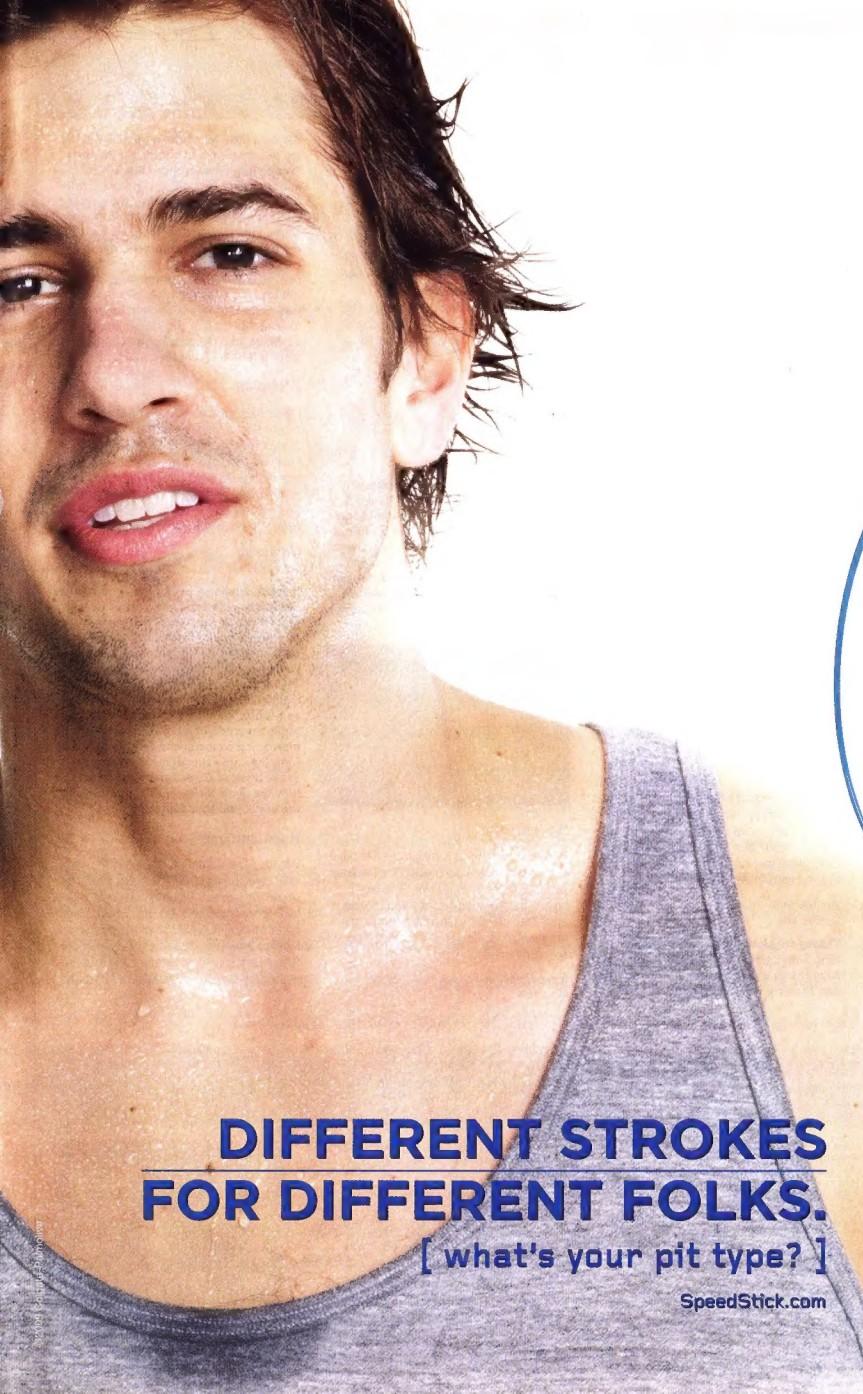


3A



3





[hairy pits]



[heavy sweating]



[sensitive pits]

DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS.

[what's your pit type?]

SpeedStick.com



Fair Point

I just have one question for you guys. Why don't you print cheats in Secret Access for games people actually buy? Like, who gives crap about cheats for some Care Bear game?

Fawad Yousufzai
via email

Like it or not, the role cheat codes play in the gaming landscape is getting smaller and smaller. You can blame a variety of factors, but the most likely reason is this: Many of the restrictions that cheat codes once helped us circumvent don't exist

Patchy Work

Andy's column last month about patches for console games got me thinking that maybe they aren't all bad. Yes, the patching process has become a nuisance — but isn't there another angle to it? Isn't it true that if a game is being patched, then the developer has not abandoned it? Even after release, it means the game is being actively attended to by its creators. Developers are continuing to support their games, even as they move onto a sequel. Aren't expansions and downloadable content patches of a sort? Let's not hang the developers yet. Sure, we want complete games at release, but I feel that a developer's continuing support for a game after its release is even more important and forgives many sins.

Larry Laderoule
via email

You're right. Not all patches are frustrating. Releasing new content and fixing balancing issues are excellent ways for developers to utilize the online capabilities of home consoles and continue to support their titles. However, a distinction should be drawn between the intent of those patches and the ones Andy referred to in his column. Some games are buggy (or simply don't function at all) until a patch is released. This "ship now, fix

later" mentality is the disturbing side of the issue. After all, many gamers can't go online with their consoles to download the bug fixes, sticking them with a potentially broken experience. When we buy a game, we want it to work properly right out of the box.

A Dungeon Master Remembered

I appreciated Matt Miller's column about Dave Arneson in the June issue. The debt I owe Dave is a special one, because the game he helped to create has been providing my livelihood ever since the late 1970s. Just as Matt did, I found Dave to be unassuming and gracious on the all too few occasions when we had a chance to spend some time together. If Gary Gygax was the out-front member of the D&D creative team (as he was indeed), then Dave Arneson was the silent partner. He never got as much face time as Gary — and that was fine with him — but his contribution to the foundation of the D&D game was no less critical. It was good to see that his role hasn't been forgotten.

Kim Mohan
Seattle, WA

Thanks for sharing your experience, Kim. Some gamers think of Dungeons & Dragons as a paper-and-pencil game; they don't realize how important D&D was

any more. When was the last time you played a game with limited continues, or one where you need to start at the beginning every time you play? In the absence of those restraints, many developers are using in-game solutions — like unlockables and new game plus — to offer the freedom cheat codes once did. To address your question more concisely, there just aren't many good cheat codes these days.

We do a little bit of clean up, like fixing punctuation and editing for length. Putting in a notation like [sic] (which indicates that something is printed faithfully despite an error) makes the person who wrote the letter look bad. In Dear GI the goal is to accurately convey a reader's question or comment, not to make them look stupid [We save that for our response! —Ed.]. For instance, most of the letters pertaining to Pokémon in this very edition of Dear GI would be nearly unreadable if all of the grammar, misspellings, and extraneous punctuation were left intact [Like that. —Ed.].

G*!@play

I surrender. I will do whatever it takes, just please stop using the word "gameplay" in all of your reviews. After reading the April issue, I realized that "gameplay" appeared in no less than 75 percent of the reviews. To what exactly does it refer? Controls? Usability? What's all of that? None of that? See: overused, utter nonsense, and non-descript.

Matt Lorenz
via email

If you're reading a book review, do you get upset when the critic references the writing? Of course not; words are the method by which a book bestows its experience on the reader. Though it sounds nebulous, gameplay is the video game equivalent. Nailing down a specific definition is difficult because it can vary from game to game, but "gameplay" generally refers to the intersection of all the elements — the mechanics, controls, and sensations — that form the core experience of playing the game. In other news, "graphics" refers to how the game looks, and "sound" means the music and sound effects.

Bryan Informer

Why do I like Game Informer? Is it the comically insightful reviews? The sneak peeks of upcoming games? The interviews with industry legends? No. It's Bryan. Yes, Bryan. I feel as if I can speak on behalf of all your female fanbase and firmly state that we want more Bryan. Perhaps a new picture each month in the staff section, a Bryan-themed activity

Send your comments to Game Informer. Snail Mail: Game Informer Magazine • Attn: Dear GI • 724 North First St., 4th Floor • Minneapolis, MN 55401 Email: deargi@gameinformer.com

GI COMMUNITY

Game Informer has a thriving online community, and this is where they can sound off about issues facing the gaming industry today.



I always felt that the romance between Cloud and Aerith felt a little forced. I'd be interesting to see more of a choice in the love triangle between Cloud, Tifa, and Aerith where the player makes the ultimate decision on who to be with, similar to the love triangles in Jade Empire or Mass Effect.

icrapp i2

The game is nearly perfect as it is. Sure, it could use a massive facelift on its graphics, but any addition to the game should just be bonuses, not affect the game we love. A new Weapon boss or extra sidequests couldn't.

Appleseed

As essential as Vincent is to the storyline, leaving him as an optional party member would be folly. Put him in for good. Optional status should be reserved for the clown shoes of the game, Caius and Tifa.

VictoryHub

Make it obvious that Tseng lives. I was surprised to see him in *Advent Children* until I read about the mistranslation in the U.S. version of Final Fantasy VII.

DTIAAAAMISLM

I might as well ask for a completely new storyline; fanboys haven't shut up about this game since it released, and they've managed

THE QUESTION:

If there were to be a remake of Final Fantasy VII, what one thing would you like to see changed?

to spoil the entire game before I even get a chance to play it.

Testament_gx2

With the additions of Crisis Core, *Advent Children*, and *Digne of Cerberus*, I would like to see references to some of the new characters that have been introduced to get a better idea of how they tie into the original story.

dbull620

Give the story a conclusive ending that doesn't open the door for dozens of copy-split-offs and sequels.

Goonenob



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ATARI

dear gi

page, or column entitled "What would Bryan do?" Whatever. I'll take what I can get.

Angie White
via email

We're not going to do...any of those things.
However, one of our staff members (who shall remain anonymous) wants to double-check that you didn't intend to write a different name, like "Ben," instead of "Bryan."

The Flood

In issue 194 in your connect interview you said the first Pokémons games in America were Pokémons Red and Green. I don't know about you, but the only "green" I saw was the 30 dollars I paid for Pokémons Blue. I think your Pokédex is flawed.

Derek Benson
via email

Many people are probably sending you angry or distraught emails similar to the one I am sending now, because many people probably noticed your mistake in your interview with Junichi Masuda and Takeshi Kawachihi. You wrote, and I quote, "The Pokémons invasion of America begins with the release of Pokémons Red and Green." Wait a minute! Pokémons Green? No! Pokémons Blue was my first ever video game — how could you have made this mistake?

Marisa Snyder
via email

In your interview with the Pokémons developers, you messed up in the timeline. You stated that Pokémons Red and Green were the two first games to come out in America. How dare you assume that Green was the first and forsake my childhood? Everyone knows that it was, in fact, Pokémons Blue.

Joe McMullin
via email

Hi, guys. I don't know if anyone has pointed this out, but in your timeline about the Pokémons series, you said that 1998 saw the release of Pokémons Red and Green. It was actually Red and Blue. Leaf Green was the only Green made, and it just released a few years ago.

Morgan Bradley
via email

That issue was full of cool stories, like exclusive looks at Modern Warfare 2 and the Oddworld game that never got made, and this is what you want to write to us about? Fine, we'll own up to our mistake — Pokémons Green was released in Japan, not North America. Maybe we should start making Pokémons-related factual errors in all of our features. As far as getting a flood of responses goes, it's super effective!



KYLE HENDRICKSON
Wearing a hoodie and a vest? Those must be the fashion police's helicopters in the background



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Enter the Game Informer Reader Art Contest! All you need to do is draw, paint, scratch, spit, or carve the best dam art you can think of and send it to us. Please include your name, phone number, and return address. If you're the monthly winner, we'll feature your work in GI and you'll receive a video game prize from the Game Informer vault. All entries become the property of Game Informer and can't be returned.



JAMES KOUTS
Who would win this epic conflict?
Our money's on the moon



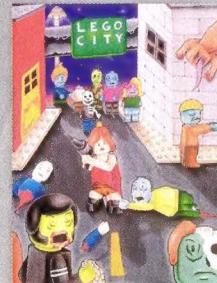
LUKE ELLISON
This is Jack from MadWorld. Of course, you would have known that if you bought the game — which you didn't



REBECCA STANSELL
"Sexy" and "Midna" are two words that seem strange together. Still, they're better than "nude" and "Tingle"



MIKE COSTA
We hope the LEGO video game craze doesn't die before this title gets made



ADAM CROYER
Sorry, guys. You cannot hide from your embarrassment and shame, no matter how much armor you wear

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Mild Language
Violence

Wii

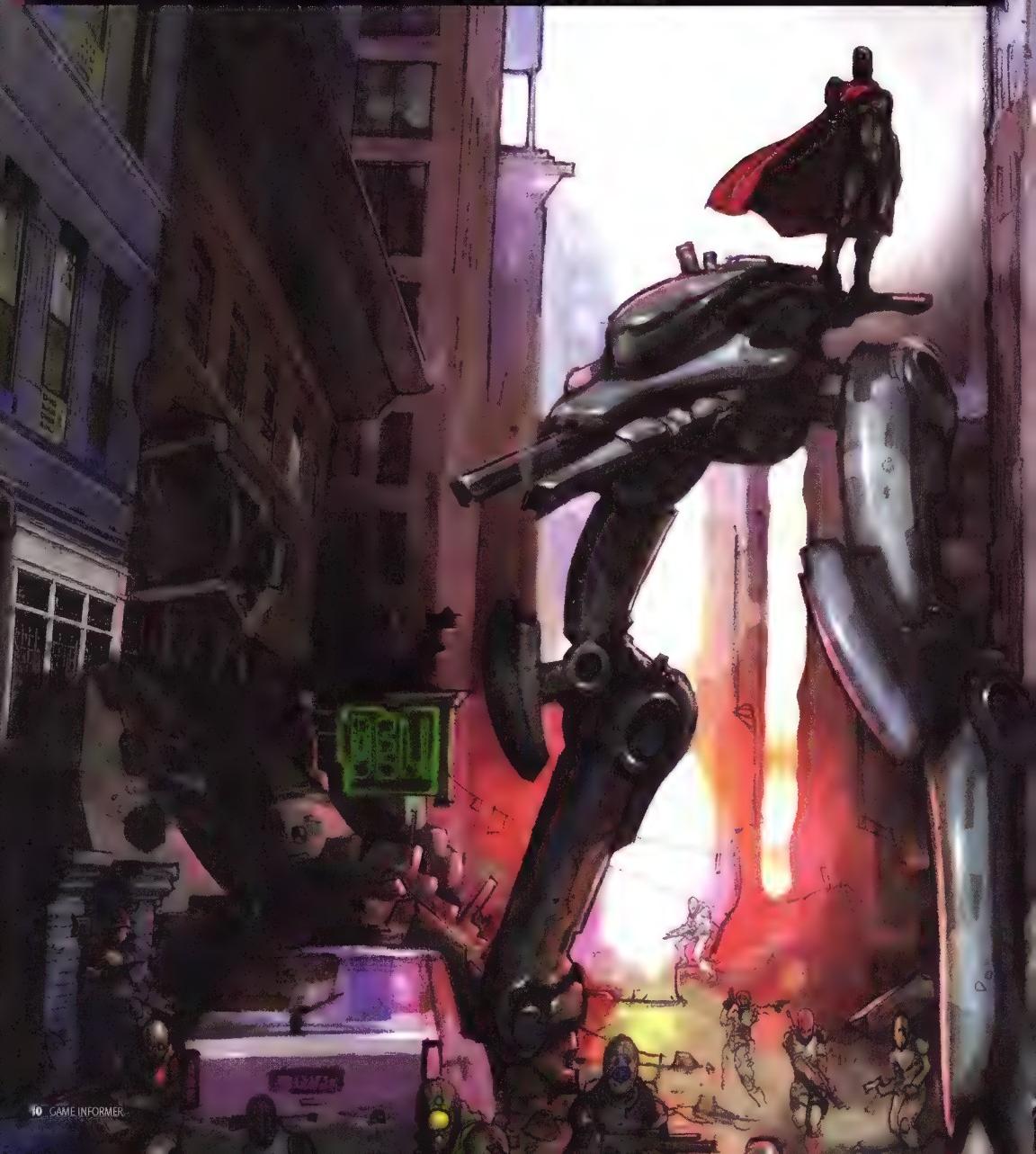


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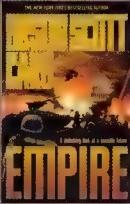
Xbox Live Arcade's Shadow Complex

Microsoft, Epic, & Chair Collaborate



In May of last year, Epic Games acquired developer Chair Entertainment – a studio that holds the rights to Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* and produced the XBLA title *Undertow*. Now Epic and Chair are working on a new XBLA title to be published by Microsoft this summer, including help from Epic Games luminary Cliff Bleszinski.

Shadow Complex is a 3D side-scrolling action title inspired by Metroid that features an arsenal of weapons and character power-ups. The game contains over 100 items and enhancements to find. Despite being an Xbox Live Arcade title, Shadow Complex features a 10-hour campaign set in a fully fleshed out world powered by Unreal Engine 3.



Building An Empire

Shadow Complex is based on the world of Orson Scott Card's novel *Empire*, which posits America's descent into a second civil war. Players assume the role of Jason Fleming, who stumbles on a rogue paramilitary group known as The Restoration, which is attempting to destroy the union.



DATA FILE

More News You Can Use

BIOSHOCK MOVIE IN STASIS

The BioShock movie has been put on hold due to an inflated budget approaching \$160 million. Director Gore Verbinski (*Pirates of the Caribbean*) says they are currently evaluating ways to cut costs in order to resume work on the film.

In more positive BioShock news, BioShock 2's multiplayer will be handled by Dark Sector creators Digital Extremes. This mode in BioShock 2 takes place before and during the fall of Rapture, as players take control of a plasmid test subject. BioShock 2 hits stores November 3.

**EA REDWOOD SHORES****NO MORE**

Dead Space/Dante's Inferno developer EA Redwood Shores changed its name to Visceral Games – the only EA studio to do so outside of the EA Partners program. In the past, the studio has handled EA's licensed properties such as James Bond, The Godfather, and The Simpsons.

**NEW S.T.A.L.K.E.R. SET**

Developer GSC Game World announced a new chapter in the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. series, tentatively subtitled Call of Pripyat. The PC FPS title, a continuation of 2007's Shadow of Chernobyl, will release this fall.

**WARNER GUNNING FOR MIDWAY**

Warner Bros Entertainment placed a bid to purchase publisher/developer Midway for \$330 million. The deal includes the Mortal Kombat franchise and its Chicago and Seattle studios, but not the San Diego or Newcastle development houses. As part of a court agreement, other competitive bids from qualified buyers must be considered before anything is final.

**FROM NAUGHTY DOGS TO MONKEY GODS**

The founders of developer Naughty Dog, Jason Rubin and Andy Gavin, are returning to gaming with a studio named Monkey Gods. The development house will focus on casual titles for numerous platforms, including the iPhone. Naughty Dog created the Crash Bandicoot and Jak and Daxter series.

NEWS**NEW VERSUS OLD****THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE BETWEEN NEW FRANCHISES & SEQUELS**

Gamers often decry the prevalence of sequels to existing franchises crowding store shelves, but a variety of factors influence publishers into choosing sequels over starting new franchises – it's not always about sales numbers. Research firm Electronic Entertainment Design and Research (EEDAR) delivers industry data and analysis to clients such as Electronic Arts, Microsoft, Sony, Capcom, and more. EEDAR's findings help shape the products that these companies release, including the decision whether to go with a sequel or put their efforts behind a new intellectual property (IP).

Looking at this comparison from EEDAR of estimated worldwide sales data of new titles and existing properties over the last five years, it's heartening to see a title like Ubisoft's Assassin's Creed sell as many copies when a few years ago it was a totally unproven game with a new control mechanism that easily could have gotten lost in the shuffle or been met with indifference.

The success of Assassin's Creed or Nintendo's Wii Fit, however, is not without significant risks. It is the attempt by publishers to mitigate and contain these risks that leads companies to put out sequels. EEDAR's Jesse Divnich, director of analytics services, tells us it's not the sales numbers that are important, it's the profit that counts.

As he describes it, the reason sequels are preferred by publishers is simply because they don't have to work as hard to get the same results. "On average, to get a new IP in the same league as your Grand Theft Autos, Pokémons, and Mario bros., you need to spend almost 10 to 20 percent more in advertising, on top of having larger development costs – and trust me, these types of marketing budgets would make a Nike advertising manager cringe," he says. "Wii Fit alone had a marketing expense that exceeded \$50 million worldwide, 35 percent more than GTA IV. For context, \$50 million would cover the Pittsburgh Pirates payroll for an entire year."

It's not that a publisher won't go above and beyond for a new IP, it's just that everything – particularly for the publicly traded companies – is a matter of risk and reward. Divnich says sequels have fewer variables that could mess up a publisher's sales projections. Guessing correctly on what will happen in the future is important because companies' plans for next year and well beyond are tied to how well the current games perform. The aspect of time is one variable that can count against a new IP. "Social trends can also deceive publishers," Divnich says. "Most AAA games have development cycles exceeding two years. What may seem like a hot idea now may not be two years from now."

The almost natural decline of a video game franchise – and the dwindling profits that go with it – leads companies to always keep both new IP and existing IP irons in the fire, continually trying to refresh its portfolio. Finding the right mix of new and old is an inexact science that each publisher must master for itself.

Top Five New Intellectual Properties*

Rank	Title (Platform)	Units
1	Wii Play w/remote (Wii)	24,000,000
2	Nintendogs (DS)	21,000,000
3	Brain Age (DS)	16,900,000
4	Wii Fit (Wii)	16,000,000
5	Assassin's Creed (PS3/Xbox 360)	7,590,000

Top Five Existing Intellectual Properties*

Rank	Title (Platform)	Units
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (PS2/Xbox)	21,000,000
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City (PS2/Xbox)	18,500,000
3	New Super Mario Bros. (DS)	17,900,000
4	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl (DS)	16,500,000
5	Gran Turismo 3 (PS2)	15,500,000

*Figures are worldwide estimates from the last five years according to EEDAR



Very stable. Well done!



Toy Story

How a Video Game Becomes an Action Figure

How much work goes into making sure your favorite character looks good in plastic? Premier toy designer NECA walks us through the steps with its new toy series based on EA's hit franchise Dead Space. The final product hits retail this July.



The Rough Cut

Starting with around 50 digital reference photos, NECA makes an initial clay model for EA to approve. This first model is made out of a wax-based sculpting clay called Castilene, and is built larger than normal (about 12 inches) so it will be easier to handle.



Detailed

Building off of the rough cut, a sculptor continues to add details. The light gray pieces of Isaac's armor you see here have been molded out of plastic. You'll also notice Isaac is missing one foot. Since he's wearing heavy boots, both feet can be identical. To save time, his right foot will be molded and duplicated later.



Completed Clay

By now Isaac has been given many of his final joints. You can see the changes to his knees, and the joints in his torso, which give him a more upright posture. Once all the detailing is finished and the developer approves the final design, the figure will be molded. If anything happens to the completed clay before this point, weeks of work go down the toilet.



The Paint Master

NECA uses a fast-drying Cel-Vinyl paint. The bright orange you see on Isaac's right arm is a base coat. The artists use hairdryers to speed up this process, so the paint doesn't smudge while the figure is handled. During this stage, EA decided that some of the chipping on Isaac's armor didn't look authentic (even though that's how it appears in the game), so NECA added extra wear and tear to higher impact areas such as Isaac's boots and elbows.



The Fine Cut/Tooling Master

The figure is sent off to the factory. The factory makes a resin model, adding Isaac's hip joint and a battery cavity so that his visor and spine will be able to light up. This figure is rescaled to about seven inches. Shrinkage occurs during production, so the figure is still five percent larger than the finished product. A mixup in the factory caused Isaac's arm joints to fuse together, so NECA had to make sure those swivel points were re-cut before production.



The First Shot

The factory begins cutting out the steel tools that will mold all of Isaac's parts. They create a black cast figure to review the articulation and assembly process. Sometimes figures will warp during this stage, and joints can either be too loose or too tight. Ironing out these few final tweaks can take an additional three to four weeks. The final plastic pour is a mix of PVC and ABS plastics.



The Variant

Many figures have variants. In this case EA suggested Isaac's Unitology costume from Dead Space's DLC. Since the detailing is so intricate, NECA sent digital files to the factory and the designs were replicated using a special Tampo printing technique. This particular figure will be available for the first time at San Diego Comic-Con later this year.

*weapons and accessories take another 10 days work

TOTAL TIMEFRAME: 90-120 DAYS

impulse

BY MATT MILLER

**Remakes,
sequels, and
spin-offs abound**



enhanced by a couple cool new ideas; the ever-changing lunar cycle affects the power of different commands, and cooperative attacks between characters open up over time. Even with that, the combat feels dated, and the multiplayer feature is tucked ori-

allowing for friends to control individual party members in combat. Ultimately, however, the real draw is the chance to revisit these great characters to take them on another adventure. An episodic release structure gives you the first six hours of the story for \$8, with even lower prices on most of the eight installments to follow – around \$3 apiece for all but the concluding chapter. All told, you're looking at an almost \$40 investment

to play the whole epic. On the other hand, this is a new Final Fantasy game in the classic style. Weigh your fandom accordingly.

Big RPG sequels aren't the only things headed to WiiWare this summer. The folks who brought you Bit Trip Beat continue their series with another retro-looking, wildly fun follow-up. **Bit.Trip Core** has the same Atan 2600-style graphics, but the rhythmic gameplay is anything but antiquated. Increasingly challenging bit patterns play across the screen,

I'm not always a fan of digging through old properties to create new games. But when that new content comes in easily digestible and inexpensive bites that I can download on a whim, I'm a sucker. Most of the games I tackle this month fall into some category of follow-up. Whether expansions to an existing game, remakes of a classic, or full-fledged sequels to a beloved story, the download game scene is awash in familiar franchises and beloved characters. Nostalgia can be a powerful incentive to buy and experience entertainment. If these games manage to move past fond memories and stand on their own, the download space should be a blast this summer.

Live Arcade gets a second dose of coze-fueled ninja action with **Turtles in Time: Re-Shelled**, a remake of the classic arcade title. The original Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles game remains a consistent top seller on Live Arcade, so it's little surprise that its sequel is getting the full treatment. Unlike the re-release of the first game, Turtles in Time: Re-Shelled boasts a complete visual

overhaul to bring it into the 21st century. Crisp, colorful 3D visuals are about the only thing that's changed – the game's levels, enemies, and music remain the same – which is a good thing. Many staffers got drawn in to the action when we played several levels this month. The brawling, foot-soldier stomping, pizza-eating action is spot on, and the four-player option can be tackled online or off. Do you really need to know more about this one? Pick it up when it releases this summer.

Last month, Square Enix gave us some choice details about its WiiWare FF IV sequel. This month, I finally got to play **Final Fantasy IV: The After Years**. The storyline picks up 17 years after the end of the SNES classic, with Cecil leading the peaceful kingdom of Baron with Rosa at his side. As their son Cedodore is preparing to join the Red Wings, tragedy strikes; a mysterious influx of monsters descends from the moon overhead. The After Years plot follows young Cedodore, drawing in almost all the classic characters from the original game in the process. The familiar battle structure is

and you have to "catch" the bits with timely button presses in one of the four d-pad directions. What starts out as overly simple becomes wildly challenging within minutes, as the patterns become incredibly complex. Don't let the looks of the Bit.Trip games fool you – these are some of the coolest and most unique titles on the WiiWare service.



Fallout 3 Point Lookout

Fallout 3 is building a reputation as one of the best games for DLC. Point Lookout delivers a brand new swampland to explore, and the fifth expansion, Mothership Zeta, heralds the return of aliens to the Wasteland. Oh, and all you complaining PS3 owners? Good news – the DLC starts trickling to your system this June.



Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a Dark Lord

My Life as a King was one of the pleasant surprises from the WiiWare debut last year. Square Enix now delivers a follow-up with a distinct flavor of its own. As newly crowned Dark Lord Mirra, you defend your tower from pesky goody-goody adventurers. Put on your evil hat in mid-July.



Zombie Apocalypse

Konami distills the fun of zombie killing into a fun four-player affair for PSN and Live Arcade. Flamerammers, assault rifles, chainsaws, and teddy bear explosives help you hold off the hordes in this decidedly old school take on the undead uprising.

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DAN VONDRAK

Project Lead, Raven Software

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE

Metallica69: We all know that movies usually surpass their game adaptations. How does it feel to be one of those rare cases that is the other way around?

DAN VONDRAK: It's great to see the positive reaction to the game. All along one of our goals was to break the stigma attached to movie games. But more important than anything else is that people are saying "I feel like Wolverine." When we started, we all agreed that the most important thing was that people say we nailed Wolverine the character. I wish the movie was being received a little better – I enjoyed it, a fun action-filled movie. I get some of the complaints, but c'mon. It's Hugh Jackman as Wolverine!

Not a bumblebee: Great game, but I notice there are a lot of weird glitches like some enemies not bleeding when you cut

off their heads, the helicopter pilot's purple blood, and other little bugs and oddities. Were you guys rushed to finish the game in time for the movie? Also, I have to ask because I am a huge comic book nerd: Is there any chance we will get a Deadpool game (preferably with the voice actor from Marvel Ultimate Alliance, plenty of fourth wall breaking humor, and everything else that makes Deadpool so freakin' awesome)?

DV: We were not rushed to finish the game just to match the movie date. The bugs and glitches are an unfortunate part of normal game development. Every game goes through months and months of QA to find and fix bugs. I think some bugs crept into the final version of the game because we just kept pushing more content and features into the game a little later than we should have. I would love to work on a Deadpool game – we've joked around plenty of times about the cool things you could do with breaking the fourth wall. For those that don't know, that means Deadpool realizes he is a comic book character – or in our case a video game character. Early on in development of Wolverine we had a Deadpool mission and even got him partially working switching between guns and swords and using a sniper rifle. We'll see what happens in the future...

Aubradley84: While the movie was rated PG-13, the game is rated M, thus restricting your audience a bit. Did you consciously go for an M rating, or did

From Star Wars: Jedi Knight to Marvel: Ultimate Alliance, developer Raven Software is one of the few studios that delivers good games based on licensed products. But is expertise in licensed product enough to overcome the obstacles attached to a movie game? Would the game be better off without the movie tie-in? Our readers and forum trolls didn't hold back punches when presented with the opportunity to ask Dan Vondrak, X-Men Origins: Wolverine's project lead, about the game.



you simply make the game you wanted and wind up with the more restrictive rating? Was there any pressure from Activision or Fox to get the game down to a T rating for the sake of increasing sales?

DV: We didn't start by saying "let's make an M-rated Wolverine." It was, "let's make the most true experience we can with Wolverine, don't worry about rating or sales!" Of course, it became obvious that we would end up as an M right away. We knew it might limit sales, and we all agreed here at Raven that it was worth it if it meant fans could say we treated Wolverine right. The guys at Raven really enjoy it when we see the fans of the comics going nuts and getting all geeky about our games – we didn't want to let them down (including the fan inside us). Activision eventually got onboard and was 100 percent for it.

UltimateEmBie: I was disappointed with the end of the game. It ended with three boss battles, which is cool, but I was looking forward to raiding the island and freeing all of the mutants. What happened there? Plus, what was behind the decision to add in the Sentinel back story? Was that purely just to extend the game, or are there ideas of a sequel being thrown around?

DV: The Sentinel, Blob, and then Gambit in a row was a result of following the movie story. Originally Gambit was not in the movie, and we had created a whole mission with Gambit that was set in the second chapter. At one point it was even suggested we remove Gambit, but we said no. When it came to the island, we just weren't sure how the movie was going to handle it, so it was tough for us to commit to anything. The Sentinel storyline was decided upon in the first week we learned we were doing a Wolverine game (before it was a movie game) – we love Sentinels. There is a whole backstory written for how that future timeline came to be and what happened to the world post-X-Men movie timeline. We wanted to give people a glimpse of that and show people we cared enough to write all of it and of course tease what could be coming.

SmackeyTheFrog: How do you guys manage to create the game and play World of Warcraft at the same time?

DV: [Laughs] Well, all that time going between flight points really adds up, so as long as you can figure out how to hold meetings, program, and do art while flying, it's pretty easy. Then there's all that time on what we call "Black Tuesday"

(when they shut down the servers for maintenance). That's four hours of uninterrupted work each week! We get a lot done then. Oh, and while we're on the subject, we put the "WoW" easter egg in the game because we are big fans of Blizzard and Warcraft – it was not done because someone made us now that we're Activision/Blizzard. People have the craziest theories.

Quasidodo: For us achievement and trophy hunters, was it a deliberate decision to leave out a way to track which tags you're missing by mission to make it more difficult, or was it just an oversight?

DV: This came down to time. We realized having that tracking would have been helpful – I think we just spent a little too much time concentrating on the combat. We decided to redo the menus and HUD pretty late so they had more of a Wolverine feel. It was more important to get the core features working properly, so unfortunately that fell by the wayside.

Grimlock4: Would you have preferred to not follow the movie story line?

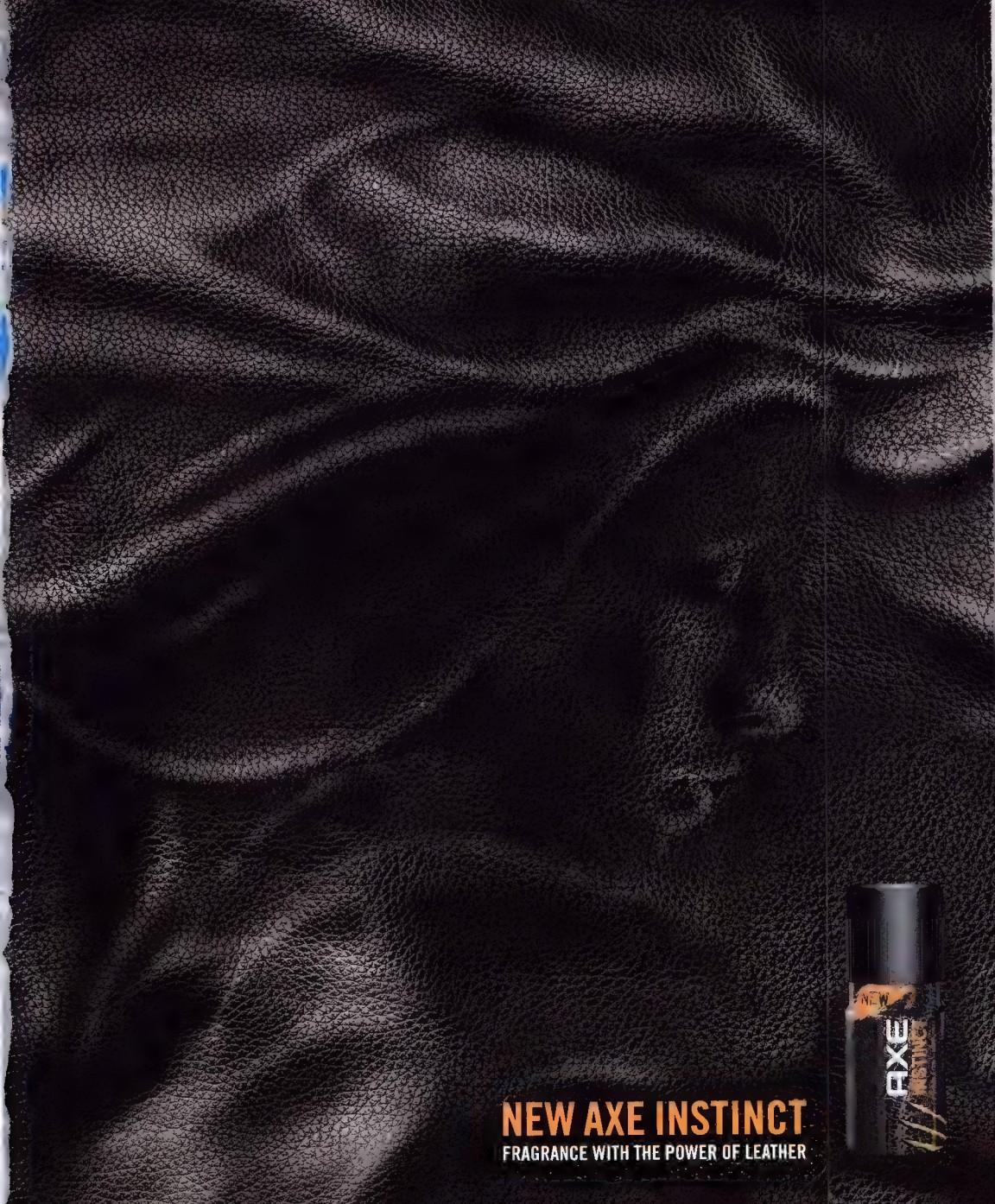
DV: Having complete freedom is always great. It's just easier when you're in total control and don't have to worry about big changes being made. But luckily we were planning on telling an origin story, so the movie story fit in pretty well to what we wanted to do. I would have chosen something a little different for Deadpool at the end, though.

Hemingway: Did Activision take Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2 away from you so that you could work on Wolverine, or did you want to tackle a movie game instead?

DV: Activision did not take MUA 2 away from us – we asked (begged) to work on the Wolverine title. We loved MUA and would have loved to make MUA 2, but Wolverine was an opportunity for us to take on an icon of comics. It was too good an opportunity to pass up. There was also a little concern with following up MUA too soon. The roster was so huge in MUA it felt like we had practically everyone. So if we were to make a MUA 2 we wanted to come up with something that was going to top the first one, without just being a rehash with the same characters. Wolverine was the perfect next title to give us a chance to do something different. Now what comes next, we'll see – we love Wolverine, but also love working with all those superheroes.

Kalub: Loved the game. Any chance that we'll see some DLC for it? I know this is an odd thing for a movie game tie-in, but it would be cool.

DV: Thanks. I think there's a good chance you'll see some DLC for Wolverine. We have had some cool ideas for DLC. Nothing official right now, but be on the lookout.



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THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY
When You Want Your News Categorized With A Sarcastic Editorial Spin

QUOTE
I just think it's more important that kids learn how to actually play the guitar.
— Prince comments on why he turned down the *Guitar Hero* franchise

**BAD**

Flash the bat signal, because *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is nowhere to be found. Publisher Eidos moved the game's release date to late summer/early fall. Eidos says the game is getting more polish, but our time with early copies of the title is seemed ready to go. Could this delay have anything to do with new parent company Square Enix?

**GOOD**

BioWare's RPG *Dragon Age: Origins* is getting its own pen and paper role-playing game supplement. It's due this summer — a few months before the video game. *Green Ronin (A Song of Ice and Fire Roleplaying)* is putting the game out, starting with a box set and following up with supplemental books.

**UGLY**

While George R.R. Martin fans wait for the author's next book, they will find no solace from the fact that France's Cyanide Games has picked up the rights to *A Song of Fire and Ice* for both consoles and PCs. The developer handles the Pro Cycling Manager series, so this should be a perfect fit.

GOOD

Rocket has announced its second Xbox 360-exclusive DLC for *Grand Theft Auto IV* — *The Ballad of Gay Tony*. Coming this fall for 1,500 MS points (\$19.99), the Ballad of Gay Tony puts you in the shoes of Luis Lopez, assistant to Tony Prince (known as Gay Tony). This new *GTA IV* DLC and the previously announced *The Lost and Damned* will be available this fall in a one-disc set dubbed *Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City* for \$39.99. While *The Ballad of Gay Tony* DLC requires you have *GTA IV* to play, *Episodes from Liberty City* does not.

**grand
theft
auto**
**THE BALLAD OF
GAY TONY**

GOOD

Confirming one of the industry's worst kept secrets, Eidos Montreal announced *Thief 4*, which the company says is in early development. The studio is also handling *Deus Ex 3*.

news

NINTENDO'S VIDEO SERVICE

FREE VIDEO FOR Wii/DSi

Nintendo continues to bolster its downloadable content. The company recently launched a free ad-supported video service in Japan called *Wii no Ma*, which Nintendo plans to bring to other regions sometime in the future. In Japan, Nintendo has partnered with the five major Tokyo networks, and anime and manga will be made available in all regions.

This new Wii channel serves as a virtual tearoom where Miis congregate to watch videos which you can rate, recommend, and send to friends. A concierge makes suggestions to you based on your demographic info and past habits.

You can also send content to your DSi, which — thanks to its SD memory card slot — allows you to store videos on the handheld. Nintendo already has a coupon service in place; users download vouchers from the company's dedicated home spaces on the channel to their DSi, and can redeem them in-store via the handheld.

BEYOND THE POLYGONS

Stories from the Development Floor

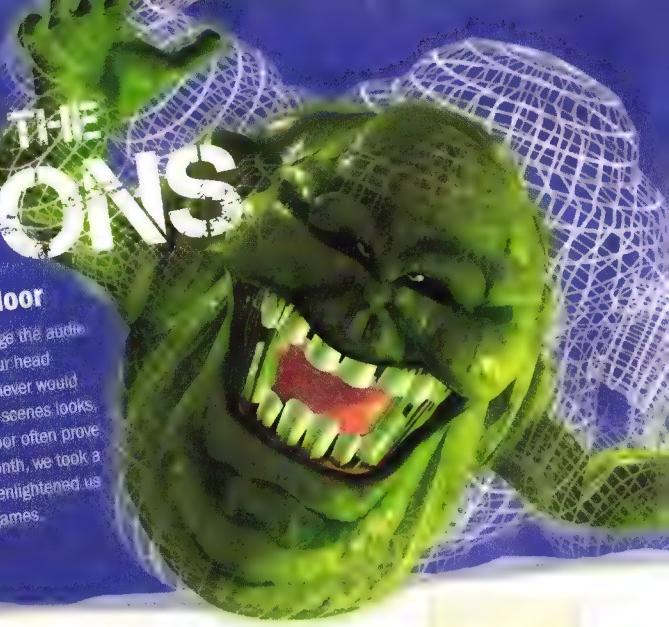
When you watch a movie on DVD, you have the option to change the audio track to director or actor commentary. This usually leads to your head being filled with details, inside stories, and oddities that you never would have picked up on. Most video games don't offer behind-the-scenes looks, and they should. Stories that come from the development floor often prove to be fascinating, and sometimes hilarious. Over the last month, we took a stroll down memory lane with a handful of developers who enlightened us on the stories behind their upcoming or recently released games.



HOSTBUSTERS

(PS3, Xbox 360) Terminal Reality

- Actual prop proton packs were recorded for the Ghostbusters' movement Foley sounds.
- The in-game Slimer model differs from the film version and the Steve Johnson bust offered on Amazon.com, because the movies never featured any clear, well-detailed shots of Slimer's backside. He has a short, stretchy tail in the game, and the bust/movie sculpt has a shapely kidney-bean backside.
- Ray's desk in the firehouse features all the prototype equipment that was developed for the game but didn't make the final cut, including ghost stasis-mine disks and five different PKE models.
- Due to an unintended similarity in appearance, one of the game's bosses was nicknamed "The Big Jesus." The 200 ft. tall Big Jesus (standing 700 ft. short of the popular '90s hip-hop act) was subsequently reworked into a much less beatific and more conventionally evil form. Certain team members still insist that the original was scarier.
- The Cursed Artifact "Mini Mansion Bear" plays a distinctive three-note groan that has been used as demo placeholder in every Terminal Reality game since BloodRayne, but has not actually been used in-game since Nocturne.
- The Rookie player character is modeled after a former Sierra associate producer, intended to accentuate an everyman appearance. The original player character was modeled after a Terminal Reality level designer, but was replaced due to a striking similarity to Half-Life's Gordon Freeman.
- 3D scans used while modeling the likeness of each actor: zero. The fast Ghostbusters film was made prior to commonplace digital scanning, so the modeler used photo and still-frame references of the actors culled from multiple films from that era.
- The cake in the Hotel Sedgewick's Alhambra Ballroom is modeled after a real-life cake created by the pastry chef wife of the Terminal Reality modeler that built it.



8,371

Bugs found in last three months.
Bugs fixed in the last three months:
8,372. One of them needed to be
fixed twice.

28,310+

Polygons in each in-game
ghostbuster model, including
proton packs

2,605

Unique character animations
in Ghostbusters

576,910

Zombies exterminated by
Terminal Reality employees
during development

\$67,173

Amount spent
on overtime dinners from
January to March 2009



RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

Volition

■ At one point in development, there were four guys named Dave working on multiplayer concurrently. From this, Volition thought about having a multiplayer-related achievement called "Honorary Dave."

■ An early weapon prototype used sound waves to clear debris. It was removed after the development team members dubbed it "the leaf blower."

■ There are nearly 100 different camera shakes in the game.

■ Wrecking Crew mode wasn't part of the original plan. It was stealthily prototyped before making it into the game.

■ For a brief period early on, Red Faction: Guerrilla and Saints Row 2 shared the same code. A data entry error caused Stilwater to be overrun by EDF.

■ The working title for the mission where you steal a mining walker from the EDF was "Walker, Martian Ranger."

■ The world covers over 10 square kilometers of Mars.

■ Three buildings across the street from Volition were demolished over the course of the project.

■ There was a bulldozer in the game for a while, but what was the point? You can plow through walls in any vehicle.

■ During development, when stresses and material strengths were still being tweaked, it was common for buildings to spontaneously collapse.

WHEELMAN

Midway

■ The sarcastic "Staying alive is a good idea" text on the death screen is placeholder programmer text that never got changed.

■ All of the Unreal source files are named with the extension .vin.

■ For five weeks of early focus tests, the original Mortal Kombat "FINISH HIM!" sound rang out during vehicle melee.

■ Only 14* animals were harmed in the making of Wheelman. (*The number of mice and rats exterminated when they started eating leftover food off the desks at night.)

OVERLORD II

Triumph Studios

■ Every team member has had a minion named after him or her.

■ In Overlord II, the development team made it a goal to offend as many different groups and ideologies as possible, so nobody has to feel discriminated against.

■ On an arctic research trip, select team members practiced the art of seal clubbing firsthand.

■ Florian Greenhart, one of the whiney elf antagonists, is inspired by that emo guy in the "Leave Britney alone!" YouTube video, and also environmental protestors.

■ Triumph Studios is located in an 80-year-old hospital. It is said that an iron lung is used for developers to recuperate during crunch time.

■ One programmer constantly attempts to get sci-fi themes and robots into the game. He hasn't succeeded (as far as the team knows).

■ Over three million minions were hurt during the production and testing of this game.

■ The game director/co-story designer likes to think the Overlord story is autobiographical.

■ The IT policy at Triumph is very strict. Only the IT manager is allowed to view porn.



INFAMOUS

Sucker Punch

■ It took over 70,000 separate art, code, and media check-in submissions to make Infamous.

■ Winter storms caused a six-day blackout of the surrounding city. This happened during the first year of development. Ironic, no?

■ In addition to the kitchen espresso, the Infamous team traveled to Starbucks approximately 18,200 times. Two groups of 10 people per day, five days a week.

■ For a party, a cake was made in the shape of a giant sea lion. No one thought about what it would be like to cut into strawberry filling until it happened.

■ There were 10 Infamous babies born during development. One employee had two during that time.

■ For approximately one month, the entire ground floor of Terminal Reality's offices could break out into spontaneous AirSoft firefights. A hasty truce was called when high-powered rifles became the armament of choice, and one civilian bystander suffered unacceptable injuries during the epic Battle That Happened Too Close To The HR Office.

■ Ghostbusters' gameplay was originally developed using a single-stick control scheme, based on the publisher's marketing tests that suggested those types of schemes are simpler to use and learn. This was abandoned for the current two-stick scheme more or less immediately upon playtesting.

GHOST BUSTERS (Wii) Red Fly

■ Everyone's favorite bug in Ghostbusters was "slime launching" By firing the Slime Spray, pressing the Z button, and pointing the reticle beneath the hero, players could actually propel the hero straight up as if the slime was a jetpack. The developers wanted to keep this in as an Easter Egg bug, but ultimately decided it could cause too many navigation issues and wasn't fair since it only occurred for the male avatar (for reasons unknown).

■ The ghost wrangling mechanic went through 10 complete redesigns and iterations before reaching its final, very fun state about a month before the game was finished.

■ One of the developers sprained both his ankles racing down the stairs to a studio-sponsored afternoon off to see Iron Man.

■ Unlike many buildings, the studio's building has a 13th floor (but no 12th floor).



the top 10 TV shows that need video games

These television shows hold a unique position. Their plots, worlds, and characters make them ripe for video game adaptations, but thus far publishers have failed to capitalize on their cache. For shame. Some of these franchises already have video games to their names, but we deem those titles crappy enough to demand a reboot. You know, like Star Trek!

1 Deadwood

HBO's Emmy award-winning Western abruptly ended when creator David Milch jumped ship to write the epic failure

John From Cincinnati. The stunted ending makes a video game adaptation the perfect opportunity to revisit the rich world. Placed amidst the widening camp battles between Cy Tolliver, Al Swearengen, and Seth Bullock, you can serve the law, become an outlaw, or work between the lines. We reckon this is a Western worth making.

2 The A-Team

Before Blackwater and Army of Two, the most popular mercs on the planet were the A-Team. Special Forces soldiers Hannibal, Face, Murdoch, and B.A. Baracus (played by Mr. T) are on the run for a crime they didn't commit, fending off the military police and taking odd jobs that involve makeshift weapons, high-speed chases, and comedic high jinks. Sounds like a natural fit for an explosive four-player co-op action game to us! With a Ridley Scott movie rumored to be in production, the timing is perfect to reinvent this cult classic.

4 Doctor Who

Since the good doctor from this popular British sci-fi show frequently uses cunning to escape life-threatening situations, *Doctor Who* doesn't come off as a natural fit for video games. But the Doctor's time-traveling police box allows him to go to any time period, which opens the game up to multiple colorful settings à la *Eternal Darkness*. Crafting a story with a strong presence of Cybermen or Daleks could remedy the lack of action, and almost every episode in the show already ends in a clever boss fight.



3 Battlestar Galactica

All this has happened before and will happen again, but let's be honest — the two *Battlestar Galactica* games aren't fit to fly a frakking Raptor. The Sci-Fi's critically acclaimed flagship series deserves the Mass Effect action/RPG treatment, with intense firefights, a rich universe to explore, and the riveting experience of not knowing if the allies you upgrade with experience in your party are humans or Cylons. So say we all.



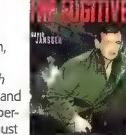
5 The Venture Bros.

Adult Swim's hilarious dissection of old-school animation is begging for the Marvel Ultimate Alliance treatment. The colorful cast of doltish heroes — most notably fraternal twins Dean and Hank Venture, super-scientist Dr. Venture, deadly bodyguard Brock Samson — fit perfectly into the four-player hack and slash formula. Team this group of gonzo good guys against aliens, Communists, and the Guild of Calamitous Intent and you have yourself a game.



6 The Fugitive

Most remember Tommy Lee Jones chasing Harrison Ford in the 1993 film, but *The Fugitive* began as a television program in the era of *The Andy Griffith Show*. Taking cues from *Mirror's Edge* and *Splinter Cell*, placing the game in the perspective of Dr. Richard Kimble, who must escape custody and find out who set him up before law enforcement can catch him could be a great gameplay hook.



7 Firefly

Joss Whedon's space western only needed 11 episodes to reach cult classic status. The franchise already supports a pen-and-paper role-playing game, and its rough space frontier is ripe for armed conflict. River Tam's hand-to-hand combat and firearm skills put her atop the list of characters we're itching to play.



8 V

Let us get this straight — aliens bring 50 saucer-shaped motherships to Earth, but just to make peace? That's quite a welcoming party. We can see your forked tongues from here, lizard jerks! Here's Michael Donovan's proposal — you land and pretend to be our friends and we'll take up arms and smoke your reptilian tails off the planet Master Chief-style with a large-scale resistance.



9 The Twilight Zone

While it's a natural fit for the adventure genre, Rod Serling's science fiction anthology allows a great opportunity for disturbing episodic gameplay of many forms. The key is tapping into the *Twilight Zone*'s signature sense of paranoia. Think of it like *Silent Hill*, but with stories that make sense.



10 Columbo

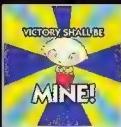
Peter Falk's shabbily dressed homicide detective looks unassuming and absentminded, but we'll be damned if he doesn't get results. As an interactive adventure in the style of the *Ace Attorney* series, you collect evidence and barge in on fancy pants dinner parties, offending the '70s social elite with your good-natured bumbling and green cigars. Oh, there is just one more thing: Answering "..." in a conversation will finally yield results!



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Themes



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Realtones

THE ALL-AMERICAN REJECTS



Gives You Hell

song4983

The Wind Blows

song4984



logo1316



logo1317



theme6214 theme6215

Even if the world is out
there's pretty good ideas.

logo1318 logo1319

DUCKY CALL

logo1320

PARENTAL
ADVISORY
EXPLICIT LYRICS

logo1321



logo1322



theme6216 theme6217



logo1323



logo1324



theme6218 theme6219



logo1325



logo1326

**Mystery
GIRL**

logo1327



ani1121



ani1122



ani1123



ani1124



ani1125



game4273



game4274



game4275

Asher Roth - I Lava College	song4985
Black Eyed Peas - Boom Boom Pow	song4986
Bow Wow - You Can Rock All	song4987
Eminem - 3am	song4988
Enrique Iglesias - We Move	song4989
Eminem, Dr. Dre and 50 Cent - Crack A Bottle	song4990
Kanye West - Heartless	song4992
Keri Hilson - Turn Me On	song4993
Kid Cudi - Day 'N' Nite	song4994
Lil Wayne - Downlow	song4995
Ne-Yo - Mad	song4996
Shia LaBeouf - Pitbull	song4997
The Fray - You Found Me	song4998
Twista - Water	song4999
Young Jeezy Feat Young Dre and T.I. - Ain't I	song5000



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LOOSE TALK

Hot Gaming Gossip



MEDALS OF HONOR HANDED OUT?

A recent job listing for a "brand new first-person shooter project in the very beginning stages of development" at EALA has people talking. Speculation is that the studio is gearing up another Medal of Honor title. The franchise's last entry, 2007's *Moh-Airborne*, bombed faster than an unopened parachute.

METAL GEAR SOLID, MONKEY ISLAND FOR DOWNLOAD?

A couple games appeared on the radar thanks to early postings on different ratings boards around the world. *The Secret of Monkey Island - Special Edition* is listed for Xbox 360 according to the German USK Rating Board, but it appears to since have been removed. It's unknown if this is strictly for XBLA, if it will show up on a disc, or if it's a Europe-only title. Similarly, the ESRB has listed both *Metal Gear Solid* and *Resident Evil* for PlayStation 3, which we believe refers to the original versions of these games being offered over PSM.



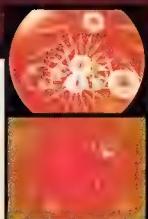
Got some insider info? Email us at loosetalk@gamer.com and we'll be all ears.

NAME THAT GAME

Test Your Sight

This Nintendo DS game was created by Japanese media artist Toshio Iwai and allowed the player the ability to create music by interacting with sea creatures. This includes tracing, poking, tapping, etc. them on the bottom screen of the handheld. You can also utilize the platform's microphone. Unfortunately, you cannot save any of your creations.

(Answer on page 25)



DUKE NUKEM DEAD... FOREVER?

3D REALMS STOPS WORK ON GAME

When your game is in development for over a decade, there are certain to be a lot of twists and turns along the way. Believe it or not, however, the tale of 3D Realm's *Duke Nukem Forever* has gotten stranger. The developer announced that it has dismissed the team working on the game, halting all development.

The game's publisher, Take-Two Interactive, is now suing 3D Realms' parent company Apogee Software, saying the developer failed to produce the PC version of the game after being paid \$12 million in 2000. 3D Realms says the money instead went to the now-defunct former publishing partner GT Interactive and that the developer saw only \$400,000.

According to 3D Realms, the fact that the company never received the money is why it stopped development, after having put \$20 million of its own money into the project. The developer even claims Take-Two knew it was strapped for cash and tried to acquire the rights to the Duke Nukem franchise and team for cheap at the last minute.

In a statement, 3D Realms says it will "continue to license and co-create games based upon the Duke Nukem franchise." While the developer continues to own Duke Nukem Forever, we must wait patiently until legal and funding issues are sorted out to determine the game's future.



DUKE LIVES ON

Despite the troubles with Duke Nukem Forever, this has no effect on the Duke Nukem trilogy for PSP and Nintendo DS. The first game, *Critical Mass*, comes out this fall. The game is developed by Frontline Studios and published by Apogee Software and Deep Silver. Despite the presence of the name Apogee on the box, this has no tie to 3D Realms like in the old days. A new company is licensing the Apogee name strictly for use on the Duke Nukem trilogy. For more on Duke Nukem: *Critical Mass*, check out our preview in issue 192, page 69.

MMO report

BY ADAM BIESSNER

FreeRealms brings high production values to free-to-play casual gaming, and Warcraft 3.1 shows Blizzard's still got it after four and a half years.

Free-to-play games are a big deal everywhere but in the U.S. That's rapidly changing, though, with companies like Nexon making headlines with the massive success of Maple Story in America over the last year. Every month a new free MMO gets localized from Korea or China. However, the vast majority of these titles – while they may be decent-quality titles with some interesting ideas – suffer from some fatal combination of poor marketing, bad localization, or themes that don't resonate with American audiences.

Sony Online Entertainment hasn't had a bona fide hit since the original EverQuest, but its latest effort hit a million players before it had been out for a month. FreeRealms is in many ways an attempt to adapt the successful Asian free-to-play model to a distinctly Western game. It's just as easy to level up by racing karts or solving Bejeweled-esque puzzles as bashing goblins in this kid-friendly MMORPG.

Much of FreeRealms' design is in service to the ideal of presenting as few barriers to players as possible. New players will likely have enough of the client downloaded to start playing by the time they finish creating a character via web browser. The majority of the game's content consists of minigames sprinkled throughout a large overworld, so SOE can stream it down to your PC in chunks as you adventure.

In a lot of ways, FreeRealms is the antithesis to the big-budget triple-A MMOs. It doesn't encourage players to form large social constructs to cooperatively take on the biggest challenges. No deep systems exist beyond optimizing your character's performance at any given task. Think of it as a bunch of casual browser games, from tile-matching to tower defense, linked together in an inviting, colorful 3D world.

FreeRealms is ironically much less free than its name implies. Much of the game's content is gated off from non-paying players, rather than merely offering cosmetic items or special items for a fee – though those are for sale as well. Entire jobs, like Wizard and Archer, require a paid subscription to explore. It's an unusual model that makes playing for free feel more like a demo or limited trial than in most free-to-play titles.



So it's different, but is it good? The answer is not as simple as you might assume. The world has a distinct art style that lends a lot of personality. Many of the minigames and activities are amusing enough to make you want to come back for more. However, FreeRealms is an amusement park, not a world. It's a nice, safe, moderately entertaining place to visit, and there are plenty of things to do. But the kind of immersion that most MMOs strive for is conspicuously absent. This is emphatically not a game for anyone even remotely hardcore.

However, FreeRealms excels at creating a fun (if shallow in game terms) experience for younger folks to share with each other and their parents. Though the game is rated E10+ for "crude humor and fantasy violence," there are no parents I wouldn't recommend this to as a solid, kid-safe title. The \$5/month subscription fee opens up the vast majority of the content, and purchasing further items through real money is hardly necessary to make FreeRealms a good time.

FreeRealms takes aim at a new, largely untested market. Its performance will be an indicator of the direction the American MMO genre is moving. One way or the other, I'm just glad to see the online space continue to diversify and offer more experiences to more people. ■ ■ ■



World of Warcraft 3.1

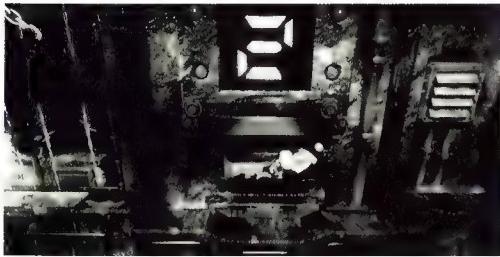
The first major content patch in a post-Lich King world is a largely unqualified success for WoW. Adding the massive raid dungeon Ulduar, as well as the solo-friendly Argent Tournament, addressed the most common complaints about Wrath of the Lich King. Blizzard is still the best there is for endgame PVE content – Ulduar features some of the best dungeon designs I've ever seen. However, some serious problems with PvP in WoW remain.

Battlegrounds are the same boring grind they've been since Burning Crusade. Wintergrasp is a lagfest and the Arena has been a nightmare of class imbalance since Wrath of the Lich King launched. This patch has some promise, with Death Knights and Paladins finally being brought down to earth, but we'll have to see how it shakes out. Blizzard has been feverishly tweaking and rebalancing everything in the Arena over the last few months, so maybe the next season will be better. If nothing else, it's obvious that the company is at least paying attention to the Arena.

On the PvE end of things, Ulduar is being cleared at a reasonable pace by top-end guilds – the world-first kill of end-boss Algalon in normal mode happened just as this column was going to print. Some players predictably complain about the "low" difficulty, but Blizzard seems pleased with the pace at which the content is being consumed. The developers' intentions seem clear enough when you take into account the Ulduar's post-launch tuning: normal modes being made easier and hard modes harder can't send any clearer of a signal.

Wrath 3.1 doesn't move the game in any unexpected directions, but you can't argue with the quality of the content.





■ Ole-Marius Lakselv's new level

VITAL STATS



OLE-MARIUS LAKSELV

Handle:
geosautus

Age:
22

Hometown:
Trondheim,
Norway

Current Favorite User-Created Levels:

"Uncle Fritz's
Fabulos Funhouse
Frenzy"
- thekillermiller

"LBL#1 - Barrel
Cannon Blast"
- dan_e2040

Accomplishments:

Ole-Marius Lakselv has been a hardcore LittleBigPlanet level creator ever since the initial beta. With innovative levels like Mad Mansion, Garden 1.1, and Mystery Mine, his levels have reached over 400,000 plays total. Media Molecule placed Lakselv on the short list of top creators when contacted by Game Informer.

Mad Mansion:

"I just wanted to play with ambience and sound effects. It turned out really creepy and cool. The riddle was really my girlfriend's idea."

The Scary Factory Overlooking the Small Village:

"The inspiration behind [this] was mainly the great contrast between the factory and the outside world in Tim Burton's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*."

Tale of the Magnificent Ruby:

"[This] was partly inspired by Indiana Jones and Uncharted, and partly by my moderated God of War level. I really wanted to make an adventure-style level."

Creation Time:

Lakselv says it takes about a month to create a new level. "One minute of gameplay is about 20 hours of work," he estimates.

Current Favorite Games:

Valkyria Chronicles, Killzone 2, and Fat Princess.

Life Outside of LBP:

Lakselv plans to graduate with a degree in animation next summer. "I would really like to get into games, but not necessarily as an animator," Lakselv says. "Level designing and concept work has turned out to be a lot of fun in LittleBigPlanet, so maybe I'll try to get into that as well."

Moderation Blues:

As any envelope-pushing LBP creator will tell you, it sucks to have a level taken down. Lakselv has had two levels removed by the moderation team: God of War and World of Colour. "When I learned that God of War was taken down I was upset, but I understood why it was taken down," Lakselv recalls. "But when World of Colour was moderated I got very angry. It was my first popular level and seeing it get moderated for no reason at all was very frustrating. Thankfully, they have sorted out the whole moderating mess now, but I still want World of Colour back!"

Improvements for LBP 2:

"I'd really like some kind of rumble emitter," Lakselv says. "I also [wish there were] a trigger that would activate on impact. You can achieve it with magnetic switches and sensors, but it involves a lot of extra work and isn't always reliable."

LittleBigPlanet

Game Informer scours the leaderboards to find the best of the best, uncover the people behind the handles, and learn their strategies. If you get a pesky message over Xbox Live or PlayStation Network from GameInformerMag, please don't delete it. You could be the next featured gamer.

VITAL STATS



RYAN TRACY

Handle:
RyanardoDaVinci

Age:
23

Hometown:
Palmdale, CA

Current Favorite User-Created Level:

"Tale of the Magnificent Ruby"
- geosautus

Accomplishments:

Ryan Tracy recreated the waterfall stage from the Konami classic Contra in LittleBigPlanet as part of a project with six other creators to remake the entire game. The LittleBig Contra series of stages has racked up nearly 200,000 plays.

Getting Started:

LBC was the brainchild of PlayStation Network user Leonidas2123. "He posted a thread on [NeoGAF.com] saying he wanted to make it and was wondering if anybody wanted to help," Tracy says. "I saw that nobody had taken waterfall yet for a few days, so I finally contacted him, and everyone had levels going already." Before the stages went live, the team tested each other's work and gave feedback.

Creation Time:

It took Tracy two weeks to create his stage.

What Konami Thinks:

"We read in an article that somebody talked to people in Konami, and they were excited about what we were doing and were happy about it and would leave it up," Tracy says.

Working Within Limitations:

It wasn't easy getting Contra to fit into LittleBigPlanet's framework. Tracy had to rescale the stage to account for short Sackboy jumps and figure out how to account for changing boss states. The LBC team accounted for the lack of gun powerups by placing stickers inside weapon boxes and some levels award extra lives for placing a Konami code sticker on the title screen.

Current Favorite Games:

Killzone 2, Metal Gear Solid 4, and Gears of War 2.

Life Outside of LBP:

Tracy is interested in game design and is considering art school. He draws and plays guitar in his spare time.

Improvements for LBP 2:

"The big thing for me that I want is water," Tracy says. "Then I'd also want to change the gravity to make it so your character can jump higher and farther than normal."



■ LittleBig Contra





ADRENALINE CRUSH

BIZARRE CREATIONS UNLEASHES CAR COMBAT TITLE

Project Gotham and esteemed racing developer Bizarre Creations recently debuted its newest four-wheeled terror — *Blur*. The game, published by Activision and coming to Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and PC this fall, mixes real-world cars and locations with car combat gameplay.

Players have offensive and defensive attacks as they tear around tracks filled with as many as 20 cars at once. Alternate routes, jumps, full car damage, and other

twists and turns are thrown your way as you try and survive to the finish line. Bizarre Creations is also touting a "community-based interface" and a "story driving social network." It sounds like the title mixes online and offline worlds and helps you create rivals and friends on the track. The game features competitive and co-op multiplayer, as well as the opportunity to create your own multiplayer modes to share with others.



TOP FIVES

Favorites From Industry Pros And GI Readers



DEVELOPER

DARREN BRIDGES

Game Designer, Sucker Punch
(*Infamous*)

1 Street Fighter II — SNES

2 Marvel: Ultimate Alliance — PS3

3 Earth Defense Force 2017 — 360

4 Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy — PS2

5 Astro Boy: Omega Factor — GBA



READER

BILLY SIRE

New Orleans, LA

1 Castlevania: Symphony of the Night — PSone

2 Super Metroid — SNES

3 Silent Hill 4: The Room — PS2

4 Bionic Commando — NES

5 Tomb Raider — PSone

Send Top Fives and a photo of yourself to:

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email: topfive@gameinformer.com

(attach digital picture)

TOP TEN

Lists...Everybody Loves Lists...

Top 10 Alternate Uses For The Tony Hawk Ride Skateboard

10 Splint for when you injure yourself... which you probably will

9 Blunt instrument for smashing Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam

8 Hors d'oeuvres tray

7 Small workbench to fix your red-ninged 360

6 Fire log (do not inhale the smoke)

5 Attach wheels to the "board" and "skate" around

4 Scrape ice off of car windshield

3 Stand on it in an attempt to make your Wii Fit board jealous

2 Footrest for use when playing EA's Skate

1 Return to the store for a full refund

Name That Game Answer: Electropelton

BUILDING THE PERFECT RPG

THE GAME WE WANT TO PLAY

We've all thought about the ultimate game — one that takes all the best parts from multiple titles and combines them into one outstanding experience. This month, we focus our imagination on a single genre: role-playing games. We've mashed together our favorite ideas, mechanics, and gameplay systems in this hypothetical blueprint for the greatest RPG in history.

HERO

(*Lost Odyssey*)

We've had enough of spiky-haired teens who accidentally get wrapped up in world-saving. Kain from *Lost Odyssey* ditched those annoying conventions; he's complex, confident, and doesn't insult the player's intelligence every step of the way. Role-playing games need more heroes like this.



FINAL BOSS

(*Final Fantasy VII*)

We know, everyone loves Sephiroth — but Kefka does the whole "mad villain" shtick better. He doesn't just threaten to destroy the world; he does it. We love bad guys who don't pull any punches, and Kefka's descent into madness makes him an even more legitimate threat. The god-like powers, too.

PARTY

(*Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*)

Some games may as well be called "Archetype Finder" for all the originality they offer in your allies. *Knights of the Old Republic* has a great cast and also allows players to develop relationships with party members. We want to see this concept explored even further, with more of an emphasis on how allies change based on your interactions.

CONVERSATION

(*Mass Effect*)

After playing *Mass Effect*, you just can't go back to the old ways. Dialogue that flows naturally makes every character involved feel more authentic, and it saves you from having to read four or five possible responses. So what if you can't choose the exact words? The sensation of a real conversation is well worth the sacrifice.

WORLD

(Fallout 3)

The lesson to take from Fallout 3 isn't necessarily the post-apocalyptic backdrop. Instead, we like how everything in the vast world – including locations, characters, and music – are thematically tied together. It conveys a unified, cohesive setting that is easier to get immersed in than a generic fantasy landscape.

ART DIRECTION

(Odin Sphere)

Odin Sphere is a prime example of the importance of visual design. Our ideal RPG would follow those footsteps, with particular importance placed on cultivating a unique and striking artistic style instead of worrying about things looking realistic.

STORY

(Final Fantasy X)

The story is one of the most important parts of an RPG, and it is difficult to pick just one model to emulate. A straight re-hash of Final Fantasy X's story wouldn't be good, but it has many themes worth revisiting. The game explores love, loss, family, and sacrifice in compelling ways, and reminds us that great stories don't always need happy endings.

CUTSCENES

(Xenosaga series)

Xenosaga might be long-winded, but when it comes to action-packed cutscenes, no one delivers like KOS-MOS. The cinematics in Xenosaga depict top-notch action and overwhelming destruction on a cosmic scale. Cutscenes should always be something to look forward to, not chores you wish you could skip through.

HUMOR

(Mario & Luigi series)

We don't want constant one-liners, but many RPGs take themselves too seriously. Lighthearted moments can keep things from getting too gloomy, as long as they don't all revolve around one supposed "comic relief" character. The Mario & Luigi series does an excellent job in this department.



COOPERATIVE ATTACKS

(Chrono Trigger)

Why haven't more games stolen this idea? Using two party members to perform one move is awesome. In addition to doing lots of damage, Chrono Trigger's dual techs give you incentive to use all of your party members in order to see all the combinations.



TIMING

(Shadow Hearts)

Attacking doesn't have to be so passive. Instead of just selecting the option from a menu, Shadow Hearts Judgment Ring has players performing a timed button-press during each attack. You hit the enemy either way, but the element of skill makes piling on the damage even more satisfying.

STRATEGY

(Persona series)

Pressing one button repeatedly to make your whole party fight is boring. The Persona series alleviates the problem by not allowing its monsters to be beaten with such a simple approach. Enhancing your party, exploiting vulnerabilities, and weakening your foes increase the depth of combat and add fun layers of strategy.

REFILL

(Chrono Cross)

The challenge in battle should come from your enemies, not from managing your resources as you slog through a dungeon. Chrono Cross gave you all your magic back after a fight, but we'd love to see health included. If you begin every fight with all your resources, regular encounters can actually be designed to challenge you rather than chip away at your patience over time.

TOP 5 THINGS TO AVOID

Silent Protagonist

Speak up, man! It's impossible to care about a character with no personality.

Surprise Princess

You're not fooling anyone. We always know you're a princess right away, so just give up the charade.

Final Boss Switcheroo

After beating the main villain, no one likes fighting a random world-devouring evil they've never seen before.

Random Encounters

Even if you can't see exactly what you're fighting, you should at least know where it's happening.

Evil Empires

We've witnessed the subjugation of the world under a sinister autocracy so many times it has lost all meaning.

As long as we're cramming together things we like, we may as well take out the things we don't. Here are the biggest clichés that have no place in our ideal RPG



CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

The Birth



While working at Moscow Academy of Sciences, Pajitnov makes the original version of Tetris on an Elektronika 60 computer.

Underground Sensation

Tetris is ported to the IBM PC, and quickly spreads through the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, becoming an underground hit.

Going Worldwide

After some negotiations with the Soviet Union, Tetris is released for PC in Europe and North America by Spectrum Holobyte and Microsoft.

New Friends



Pajitnov meets American businessman Henk Rogers. They become quick friends, and Rogers would soon play an instrumental role in bringing Tetris to the world.

The Phenomenon Begins

Rogers secures the handheld rights for Tetris from the U.S.R.R. and licenses the game to Nintendo. Nintendo packs Tetris in with its new Game Boy, and the combo eventually sells over 35 million in sales.

Getting Control

With the Soviet Union now a memory, Rogers and Pajitnov establish the Tetris Company, a partnership that now controls all the rights to Tetris.

Yes Man



Famous Yes album cover artist Roger Dean creates a new logo for Tetris.

Going Mobile

Henk Rogers establishes Blue Lava wireless to develop Tetris for mobile devices in North America.

Pop People

Tetris is launched for iPod and quickly becomes the number one game on the platform.

Award Tour

For his outstanding accomplishments, Pajitnov is awarded the prestigious First Penguin Award at the Game Developers Conference.

ALEXEY PAJITNOV

CREATOR, TETRIS

>> Tetris is universally regarded as one of the greatest games ever made. In celebration of its 25th anniversary, we spoke with the game's creator, Alexey Pajitnov. <<

How did you become involved in computer programming and computers?

Well, that was my education. When I graduated after high school, I entered the Moscow Institute of Aviation. My specialty was applied mathematics, and that's why programming was absolutely natural for me. After I graduated, I started working in the Computer Center of the Academy of Sciences, which was a research institute in computer science at that time.

What were you working on professionally when you came up with Tetris?

I was a researcher in the artificial intelligence department, so my main task was automatic speech recognition. I used to work very close to the hardware with the assembler programming.

How did you first come up with the idea for Tetris?

All my life I was very involved in all kinds of mathematical riddles and puzzles. I participated in [them] in school; I always liked all kinds of those mental challenges. When I finally got to the computer with an operating system [in the] Pascal language, I

How did Tetris get released commercially in the west?

Well, originally interest in the game was shown by the British agent called Robert Stein. He noticed the game in Hungary and addressed the Computer Center with the proposal to license it. We had no right to negotiate with him according to Soviet law; just the special agency [ELORG], a Soviet software licensing bureau – Ed.] could do it. I called the ELORG, and the ELORG had a lot of conversations with Robert Stein. Finally, after a lot of trouble, some kind of license was obtained, and the game was published in '88 by Spectrum Holobyte and Mirsoft in Europe and America. Henk Rogers [of Bulletproof Software] saw the game on PC and then he licensed it from them for the Japanese market on PC. Then he came to Moscow looking for the rights for other platforms. I met him in Moscow when he came to see ELORG for more rights for Tetris; he had the Game Boy in mind.

Tetris really took off in America on the Game Boy. Did you have access to Game Boys in the U.S.S.R.?

No. As a matter of fact it was never available in

Since the '90s, games have evolved in a cinematic, more complex graphical direction.

However, we're seeing a return to more casual, puzzle games like Tetris with the popularity of mobile gaming and the iPhone.

It's amazing. The new platforms come along and make us remember all our old games and enjoy them again. During the '90s, I struggled because the genre of puzzle was very unpopular. All these dynamic games with rich environments looked more attractive, and the mental games that I love were kind of on the periphery. But suddenly, casual gamers came up. Lots of people just don't want to get involved with hours of studying and gameplay. The genre of puzzle was revived, and I was so pleased with it. Nobody could predict that. In the middle of the '90s, I felt like a dinosaur – I was ready to die forever! [Laughs]

Now that there is this market again, do you have any new games that you're trying to come up with and publish, and new projects that you're working on now?

Well, I did several games – first of all I worked for eight years at Microsoft in [their] game department,

[Tetris] is simple and very clear for people; they understand how to play it from the first look.

immediately started to put together small puzzles and games.

You made the first version of Tetris in 1984. Was that first version a lot like the Tetris that we know today?

The first version I came up with was written on the Russian computer called the Elektronika 60. It was a clone of a PDP-11 machine, the very first kind of desktop computer. The problem is that it has no graphics ability at all. The computer could only produce text, just alphanumeric symbols. [Laughs] So my first version was done on this screen, and I used square brackets to draw the squares of the tetrominoes – open and closed square brackets looks like a square, you know? So all the design was done in a slightly funny style. But the rest of the game was about the same as you see now.

Did the first Tetris feature the same set of block shapes that we know now?

The exact same pieces that I have on my original version. As a matter of fact, it is a standard kind of set, which is used in puzzles or in riddles. It is a very popular set which inspired me for Tetris.

Russia. I do not believe they even sold Famicom in Russia. I do believe there was some kind of Taiwanese clone of Famicom sold in Russia called "Denji" or something like that [it's actually called Denji Junior – Ed.]. Later, just after perestroika in the middle of the '90s the Game Boy appears in Moscow, not before that time. But I was lucky, I was the first person who saw Game Boy in Russia.

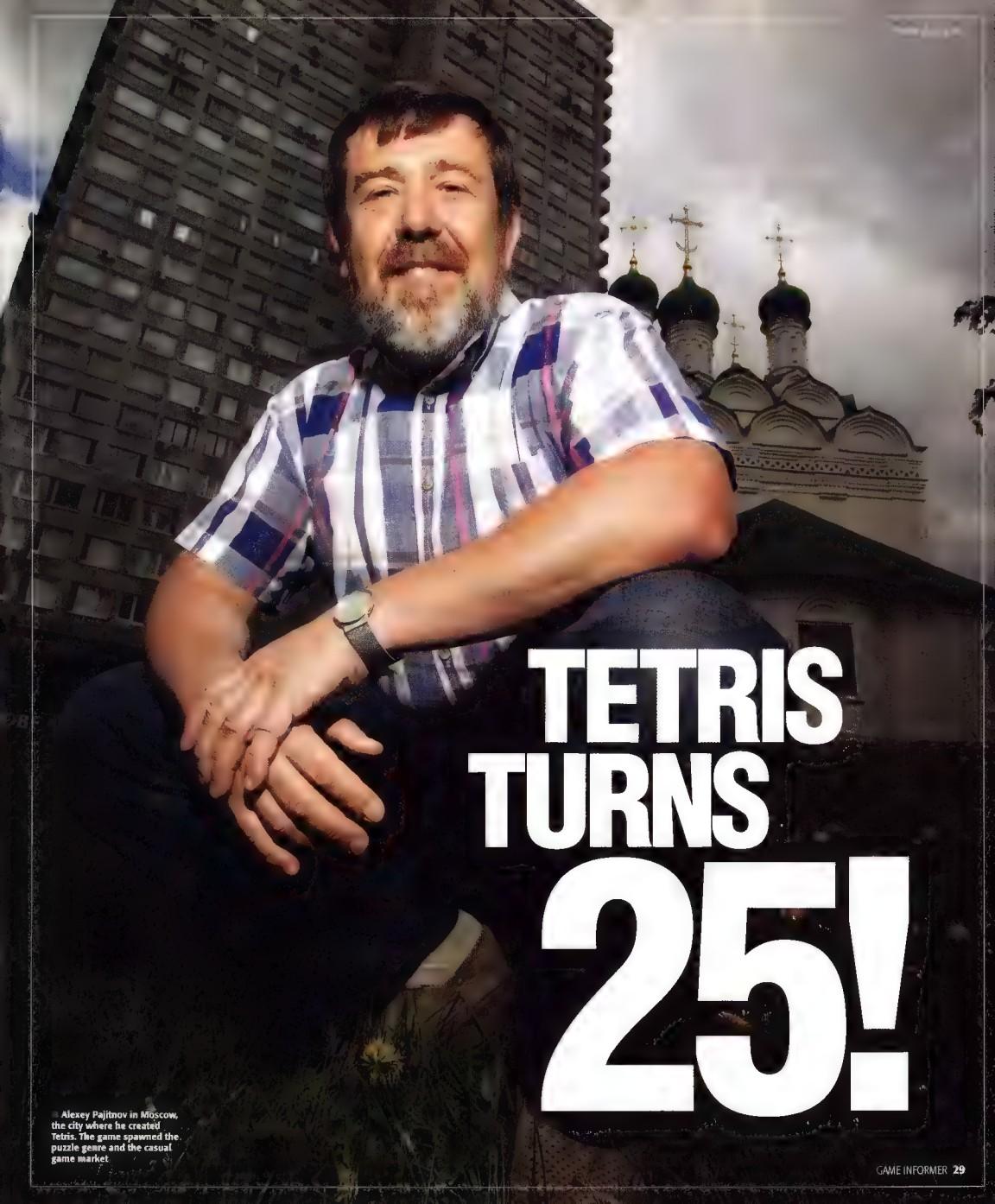
Nintendo gave you one?

Yes, I visited Japan in '89 – Henk invited me – and I spent the entire month there, and I visited Kyoto, Nintendo headquarters. That was a very fascinating moment in my life because in the warehouses of Nintendo, they had boxes of cartridges of Tetris. When we were working on the license we were always discussing the hundreds of thousands of pieces we had to sell to break even, but it was just an abstraction. But I saw these 100,000 in the flesh, you know? That was really impressive. It was hundreds and hundreds of meters of boxes with my game. I was really proud of myself at that moment. [Laughs] It was my first visit outside of the Soviet Union.

and I did several games there. And later I did a couple games. Right now I don't have any kind of project I'm working on. From time to time, I get some ideas and try to place them with some of my friends' companies and...well, I've become a little bit lazy. In order to make a game you need to put in a very big effort, you know? [Laughs] So I don't get involved actively in any projects, but I try to consult people and give my advice.

Twenty-five years on, why do you think Tetris has been so long lasting?

I really don't have the definite answer for this question; it's a mystery for myself. The game is simple and very clear for people; they understand how to play it from the first look, which is very important. The game is creative rather than destructive. People create order out of the chaos rather than destroy the data like they do in shooting games. And that spirit of creativity is very important for the game.



TETRIS TURNS 25!

Alexey Pajitnov in Moscow,
the city where he created
Tetris. The game spawned the
puzzle genre and the casual
game market.



LOGITECH G19 GAMING KEYBOARD

The fact that it needs its own AC adapter tells you all you need to know about this keyboard. The macro buttons, volume knob, and other extras are fine, but the addition of a full-color LCD screen in the middle of the board is gaudier and even less necessary than the older G15's simple monochrome display. If you're the kind of person who has to watch YouTube while playing World of Warcraft, you'll be better served by putting your \$200 towards a second monitor.

\$199.99 • www.logitech.com

NYKO



peripheral

NYKO WAND

VERY GOOD

Most Wii accessories are lightsaber attachments or other cheap pieces of plastic that shape your controllers into guns, but the latest Nyko release actually serves a purpose. This is a fully functional replacement to Nintendo's Wii remote. We dig the unit's ridged B button and the lip on the nunchuk's Z button, both of which prevent finger slippage. The ridges over the battery casing are a nice touch for those who don't like to use Nintendo's controller jackets. Too bad the big square buttons make the thing look frumpy and the d-pad is so blocky. If you're looking for a new Wii remote and you want to save five bucks, this controller does the trick.

\$34.99 (wand) \$49.99 (bundle) • www.nyko.com



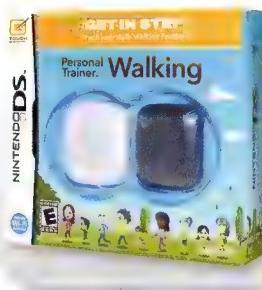
tech

ENERGIZER INDUCTION CHARGE STATION

VERY GOOD

This sleek, attractive controller station uses induction technology to charge your Wii remotes, meaning you won't have to plug in your controllers or even remove their protective jackets. Charging takes a while (6 to 10 hours), but the unit is easy to use, and lasts nearly as long as a normal battery. The one big fault is that these batteries cover the controller's sync button, so you'll have to sync a remote to your Wii with separate batteries. This isn't a problem for most people since their remotes are already tied to their Wii, but anyone who regularly finds themselves taking controllers over to a friend's house will find this annoying.

\$49.99 • www.pdp.com



lifestyle

DS PERSONAL TRAINER WALKING

LIMITED APPROVAL

If you're like us, you'll do anything to get out of doing real exercise. Blech! Maybe all you need to do for a healthier lifestyle is walk more. Nintendo is ready to help you out with a pocket-sized Activity Meter that talks to your DS. Using the Personal Trainer Walking software, you can chart your daily rhythms to see if you're walking enough. The package also comes with a couple game-like aids that encourage you to walk more. Nintendo even suggests you attach an Activity Meter to your dog to make sure pooper is getting enough exercise. This set comes with two pedometers, but you can purchase more for the rest of your family (or pets) in the near future.

\$49.99 • www.personaltrainervalking.com

games

SPOILS OF WAR WORLD OF WARCRAFT MINIS EXPANSION

The first expansion to Upper Deck's popular WoW miniatures game includes 51 new figures in randomized three-figure booster packs. The collection features prominent characters like Jaina Proudmoore, Prince Kael'thas Sunstrider, and the rare Lady Vashj. Action bar cards and new equipment cards let you customize your characters in a variety of new ways, and, as always, Upper Deck provides plenty of cool new loot cards for use in the online game.

\$14.99 • www.wowminis.com

**toys**

MARVEL BISHOUJO BLACK WIDOW AND ROGUE STATUES

We covered DC's line of anime-esque figures last month, so now it's Marvel's turn to flash us the goods. (Ahem!) Expert Japanese manufacturer Kotobukiya is releasing sexy figures of Rogue and Black Widow. Each one stands a little over seven inches and is based on designs from famed Final Fantasy X character designer Shunya Yamashita. A blond Black Widow variant will be available exclusively at this year's San Diego Comic-Con. This is a great start, but where's Phoenix?

\$59.99 • www.bigbadtoystore.com

**tech**

XCM CROSS FIRE CONVERTER

REFURBISHED REVIEWED TESTED UPGRADED DIAGNOSED REPAIRED

For those who have always wanted to use their PS3 controllers on the 360 (who are you?) XCM developed this handy converter. The device replicates Sixaxis motion as a second input for either analog stick, and adds rapid-fire rates to any of the buttons. You'll still need to have a Xbox 360 controller plugged into the unit, so you can't throw out all your old pads just yet. The unit also doubles as an extension to wired Xbox 360 and original Xbox controllers, giving them turbo functionality. The converter works great; we just question the purpose and the price. For those who are interested, XCM also sells adapters that let you use PS2 controllers on the 360 or PS3.

\$84.99 • www.extreme-mods.com

**media shelf**

1. Ghostbusters 25th Anniversary Edition

Timed perfectly with the game release, this Blu-ray version of the '80s classic features a picture-in-picture viewing experience called Slimer Mode and a documentary about refurbishing the ecto-1.

\$28.95 • www.sonypictures.com

2. Lost Seasons One & Two

Oceanic Flight 815 is ready to crash-land on Blu-ray. With only one season of ABC's hit sci-fi drama left, maybe it's time to find out what all the fuss is about.

\$69.99 (each) • www.abctvstore.com

3. Reaper: Season Two

When Sam learns that his parents sold his soul to the Devil, he's forced to be Hell's bounty hunter. Season two of the CW's hilarious drama keeps the wacky adventures coming.

\$39.98 • www.lionsgateshop.com

4. Street Fighter IV Soundtrack

Nothing makes kicking some guy in the face better than when you do it to some rocking tunes. Street Fighter IV's epic soundtrack is available now on this two-disc set.

\$15.98 • www.sumthing.com

5. Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People Collector's DVD

From ruining Homestar's life to participating in a massive rock-n-roll battle, all five episodes of Strong Bad's hilarious adventure game finally make their way to DVD.

\$34.95 • www.telltalegames.com/store

JOE JUBA
ASSOCIATE EDITOR, GAME INFORMER



Why can't gameplay include the jaw-dropping moments typically reserved for cutscenes?

When I first got my NES, my parents allowed me to rent two new games every month. The choice was always agonizing: new titles were coming out faster than I could play them, so I had to make each rental count. Even under that kind of pressure, I could never bring myself to rent two new games every month. One of them was something I had never tried before, but the other was usually Ninja Gaiden. Here's the strange thing: I didn't even like playing Ninja Gaiden. The only reason I kept spending my hard-earned allowance on it was so I could watch the ninja duel in the opening cutscene over and over again.

It was just too awesome: two ninjas squaring off in the night, running through a grassy field, and crossing swords in mid-air with the full moon behind them – followed, of course, by Ryu's father collapsing as soon as he hits the ground. Watching that sequence repeatedly, I was transfixed; the graphics, the music, and the story culminated in one of the most memorable slices of gaming history. Cutscenes with that same groundbreaking quality are rare these days, and I think I know why: Video games are outgrowing them.

I will not deny that some of the most tremendous moments in our gaming heritage have transpired during cutscenes: seeing Little Mac in his pink jumpsuit, punting up to Mega Man on top of his skyscraper, and watching Sephiroth kill Aerith. However, many of these defining scenes are from eras in gaming where simply seeing your character rendered in more detail was a reward in and of itself. With the amazing visuals home consoles can produce now, the line between in-game graphics and rendered cutscenes is getting blurry, and the returns on CG-intensive sequences are diminishing. When games can look as good as Gears of War 2 or Resident Evil 5 when you're in control, how much can rendered movies really contribute?

With players getting so much visual payoff during

regular gameplay, many cutscenes these days up the ante in terms of pure adrenaline. Slow-motion gunfights, continent-destroying magic spells, and intricately choreographed fight scenes – these elements now fill the role graphics once served, giving players something the normal experience can't provide.

That's where I start to run into problems. Why can't gameplay include the jaw-dropping moments typically reserved for cutscenes? Granted, it is exhilarating to watch Master Chief dive into the stratosphere while holding a bomb... but it would be even more exhilarating to control. Video games are an inherently interactive form of entertainment. Something seems wrong with the concept of having gamers guide a character to the cusp of an outstanding moment only to relegate them to the role of an observer once they trigger a cinematic.

The segregation of gameplay and cinematics is a holdover from the old days. Video games are capable of delivering cutscene-caliber action and visuals during the course of play, and have grown beyond the need for that artificial barrier between the two. Many of the most acclaimed titles of the past few years have made clear efforts to eliminate the need to jump between passive and active engagement – just look at Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare and BioShock. Both games weave cinematic set-piece moments into the fabric of the game. I won't forget watching the plane fuselage crash into a tunnel in Rapture, nor can I shake the images of a post-nuclear explosion as seen by Sgt. Paul Jackson.

Those moments are outstanding not only because they feature unexpected developments, but also because they allow players to participate in the action. I hope that we see more of this in the future, players will always appreciate the ability to control something awesome – particularly if it changes the game's normal mechanics. Metal Gear Solid 4 is particularly adept in this department; treats like piloting Metal Gear Rex or crawling through the microwave corridor are among my favorite memories from that title.

Before I give the impression that all interactive cutscenes are the wave of the future, I'd like to point a cautionary finger down a dangerous path. In recent years, the context-sensitive button presses popularized by God of War have been the go-to alternative to traditional cutscenes. Frankly, they aren't working as well anymore. I loved them at first, but as they become more common, their fatal flaw is clear: Context-sensitive events split players' attention between gameplay and cinematics, preventing them from fully appreciating either. In other words, these events feel like two disparate pieces overlaid on each other, accentuating the division between them rather than breaking it down. They were a great step in the right direction, and now it's time to keep moving.

I'm not advocating the removal of cutscenes altogether. However, the video game industry can present action in its own unique and explosive way, and it shouldn't be taking cues from passive media in that area. Games could learn some lessons from the film industry in the handling of compelling dialogue, emotional drama, and plot exposition. Story will always remain an important part of gaming; narrative and character development are ripe for exploration, and those are areas that could be greatly enhanced with some cinematic flair.

Cutscenes have essentially been around since the beginning, and they have been used in the same way for so long that I wonder if it is merely out of a sense of obligation. I am truly thankful for all of the defining moments that I have witnessed over the years, but I think it's time for game developers to hand over the controller and leave the action to us. ■ ■ ■

The views and opinions expressed on this page are strictly those of the author and not necessarily those of Game Informer Magazine or its staff.



LEAVING CUTSCENES BEHIND

If you work in the industry and would like to share your opinion, contact senior editor Matt Helgeson at matt@gameinformer.com

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thur

fri

sat

july

For more information on these games and others go to www.gameinformer.com



The King of Fighters XII – 07/07



NCAA Football 10 Xperience – 07/14



G-Force – 07/21



Wii Sports Resort – 07/28

NEW RELEASES

- The Bigs 2 – PS3, 360, Wii
- The King of Fighters XII – PS3, 360

07

Today's comic book release, *Marvel Divas*, tells the story of four single women looking for love and excitement in a big city. Think of it like *Sex and the City*, except instead of four clutching hen's, you have four clutching sexy hen's. There's Black Cat, fist kiss with Hulk, Photon trying on shoes, and Frostar immobiliating the trendiest restaurants in the city. Wow... this could be the most terrible idea ever conceived.



01

On July 7, the day before this one, Sci-Fi network is officially changing its name to SyFy (gosh), thus continuing the trend of TV networks are the most popular. They're kicking off its new look/look with the two-hour premiere of *Warehouse 13*, a show that draws its inspiration from the warehouse featured in the Indiana Jones movies. What strange alien artifacts are boxed up inside? We can't wait to find out!

08



Remember back in 2006 when everyone thought they were being hilarious by repeating lines from *Borat*? Well, brace yourself for another round of that, because Sacha Baron Cohen's new film, *Bronx*, opens today. You might not even have to go see it, since all of the best jokes will be undoubtedly told and re-told, to you with substantial delivery and timing. Very nice!

03



NEW RELEASES

- Art Nation - DS
- Black College Football the Xperience - 360
- NCAA Football 10 - PS3, 360, PSP, PSP
- Science Papa - WII, DS
- Sherlock Holmes Mystery of the Mummy - DS

14

"Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince" casts a spell on theatergoers today. Since no one cares about Harry Potter anymore, we figured we would save you some money by telling you what happens in this sixth installment. Harry tries to score with a chick, Ron tries to score with a chick, and Hermione reads another book. At the end, Dumbledore kills Snape with min bullets... and a blowtorch.

15



What would happen if you threw a box of crayons at Green Lantern? Weird like to think he'd color a picture for his parents' refrigerator, but DC Comics has a different idea in mind. What if there was a Red Lantern, a Yellow Lantern, a Blue Lantern, an Orange Lantern, a Pink Lantern, and a Black Lantern? Starting today, DC Comics' kicks off a war of the rings in the eighth-part of the comic book series, putting our money on the pink. Care Bear was always our favorite.

17



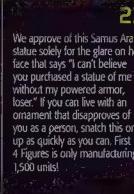
NEW RELEASES

- G-Force – PS3, 360, WII, PS2, PC, PSP, DS
- Little King's Story – WII

21

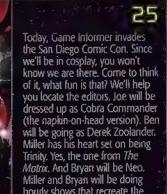
"Why wait until college to learn about video game level design?" Michigan State University's 3D and 2D video game design camps are specifically for high school and middle school kids. This course teaches the youth how to make their own video game levels using Adobe's latest tools. It is available for three weeks in July. Visit <http://ism.msu.edu/camps/> for details and registration.

22



We approve of this Samus Aran statue solely for the glaze on her face that says "I can't believe you purchased a statue of me without my powered arm-losers." If you can live with an ornament that disproves of you as a person, snatch this one up as quickly as you can. First, though, Figure 8 is only manufacturing 1,500 units!

23



Today, Game Informer invades the San Diego Comic Con. Since we'll be in cosplay, you won't know we're there. Come to think of it, we'll probably help you locate the editors. Joe will be dressed up as Cobra Commander (the napkin-on-head version). Ben will be going as Derek Zoolander. Miller has his heart set on being Trinity. Yes, the one from *The Matrix*. And we'll be joined by Miller and Bryan who will be doing hourly shows that recreate the scene of Neo resuscitating Trinity's heart. Throw whatever you can at them.

25



NEW RELEASES

- Aliens in the Attic – WII, PS2, DS
- Bionic Commando – PC
- Dreamer: Zookeeper – DS
- Gears of War 2: All Fronts Collection – 360
- Space Bust-A-Move – DS
- Space Bust-A-Move – DS
- Wii Sports Resort – WII
- Wollowenstein – PS3, 360, PG

28



Written and directed by Judd Apatow and starring the likes of Adam Sandler, Seth Rogen, and Jonah Hill, *Funny People* sounds like a comedy movie, but it's not. The movie, which opens in theaters on the 10th, on the other hand, Eric Bana is in this film. So maybe it could be called *Wooden Actors With No Talent*. Bana sucks!

31





OLD DEMONS...

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC
MULTIPLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA)
PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR GAMES
DEVELOPER ROCKSTAR VANCOUVER
> RELEASE WINTER

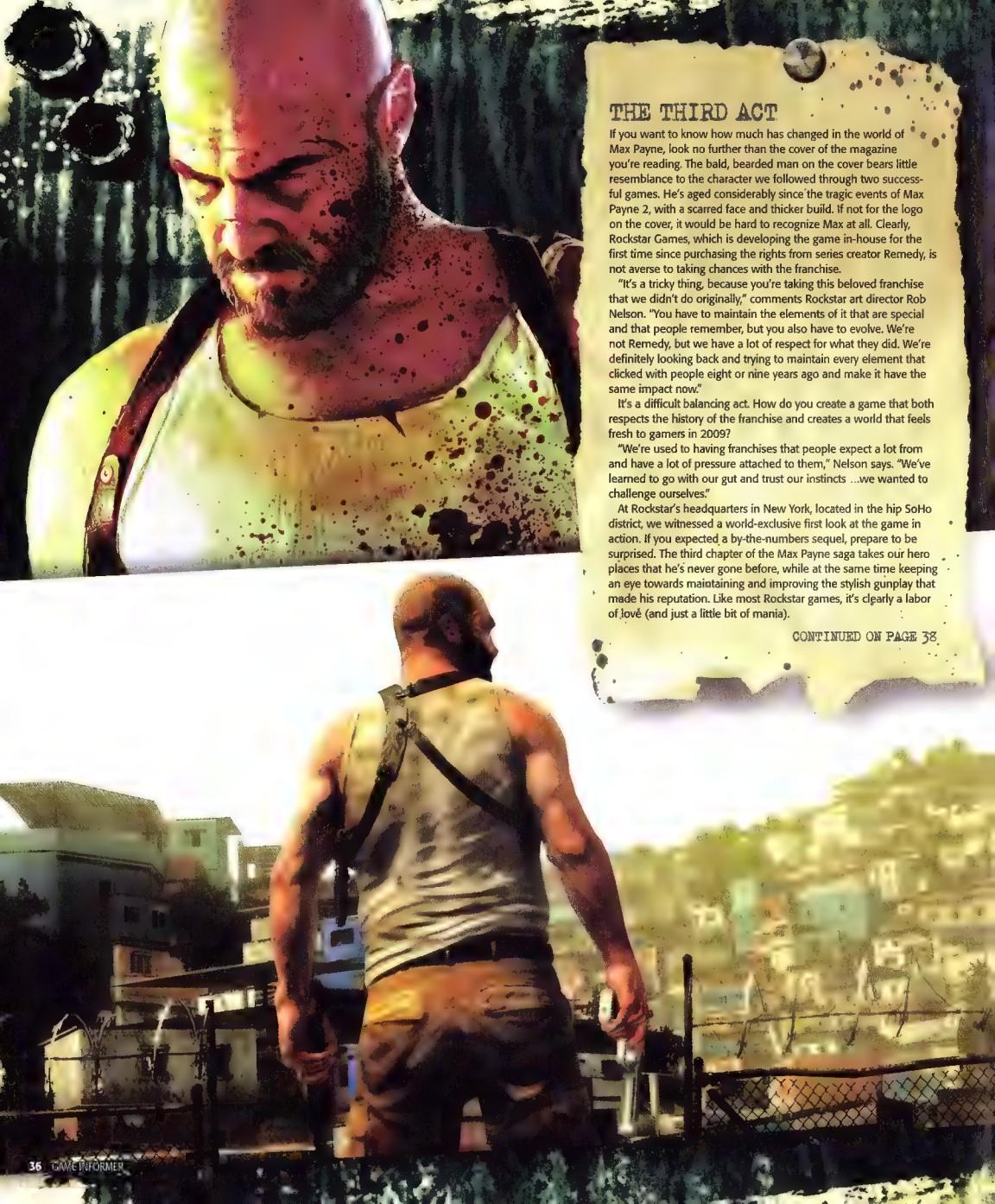
NEW BEGINNINGS



What does it feel like to lose everything? Most of us will never know. But what would you do if you lost your job? Your true love? Your sanity? Your reasons for living? Rockstar's long-missing noir hero, Max Payne, knows the answer to these questions.

Max has been absent from the video game landscape since the 2003 release of *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne*. The long-awaited *Max Payne 3* features a hero much different from the handsome

character we once knew. This new Max is older and harder, marked with the scars of his fall to the bottom. While he's still very much a violent man of action, the world around him has moved on and so has he. What would a man with nothing left to lose do to get one more chance at the good life? This question will ultimately be answered in Rockstar's next epic adventure.



THE THIRD ACT

If you want to know how much has changed in the world of Max Payne, look no further than the cover of the magazine you're reading. The bald, bearded man on the cover bears little resemblance to the character we followed through two successful games. He's aged considerably since the tragic events of Max Payne 2, with a scarred face and thicker build. If not for the logo on the cover, it would be hard to recognize Max at all. Clearly, Rockstar Games, which is developing the game in-house for the first time since purchasing the rights from series creator Remedy, is not averse to taking chances with the franchise.

"It's a tricky thing, because you're taking this beloved franchise that we didn't do originally," comments Rockstar art director Rob Nelson. "You have to maintain the elements of it that are special and that people remember, but you also have to evolve. We're not Remedy, but we have a lot of respect for what they did. We're definitely looking back and trying to maintain every element that clicked with people eight or nine years ago and make it have the same impact now."

It's a difficult balancing act. How do you create a game that both respects the history of the franchise and creates a world that feels fresh to gamers in 2009?

"We're used to having franchises that people expect a lot from and have a lot of pressure attached to them," Nelson says. "We've learned to go with our gut and trust our instincts ...we wanted to challenge ourselves."

At Rockstar's headquarters in New York, located in the hip SoHo district, we witnessed a world-exclusive first look at the game in action. If you expected a by-the-numbers sequel, prepare to be surprised. The third chapter of the Max Payne saga takes our hero places that he's never gone before, while at the same time keeping an eye towards maintaining and improving the stylish gunplay that made his reputation. Like most Rockstar games, it's clearly a labor of love (and just a little bit of mania).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38



The Story So Far

Max Payne 3 continues one of the most twisted sagas in all of gaming. If you haven't experienced the first two Max Payne games and want to get up to speed, here's a brief synopsis. Obviously, this sidebar contains spoilers, so don't read it if you want to play the first two Max titles – both of which are currently available for download on Xbox Live.

Appropriately, this dark series begins with a tragedy. Max Payne, a New York police officer, returns home to find his young family murdered by some junkies high on a new designer drug called Valkyr. In despair and hungry for revenge, Max transfers to the DEA and eventually ends up as an undercover agent in the Punchinello crime family, which is heavily involved in New York's Valkyr trade.

During a meeting with fellow agent Alex Balder, Max becomes the subject of a murder investigation when Balder is killed by an unknown assassin. With his cover with the Punchinellos blown, Max addresses this situation the only way he knows how: by launching a one-man assault on the Punchinellos. The only problem? They've hired comely assassin Mona Sax, who drugs Max and leaves him for dead at the hands of the Punchinello's goons.

The Valkyr conspiracy goes much deeper than just the mafia. Through a shocking series of events, Max learns the evil Aesir Corporation and its *femme fatale* CEO Nicole Horne developed the drug in conjunction with the U.S.

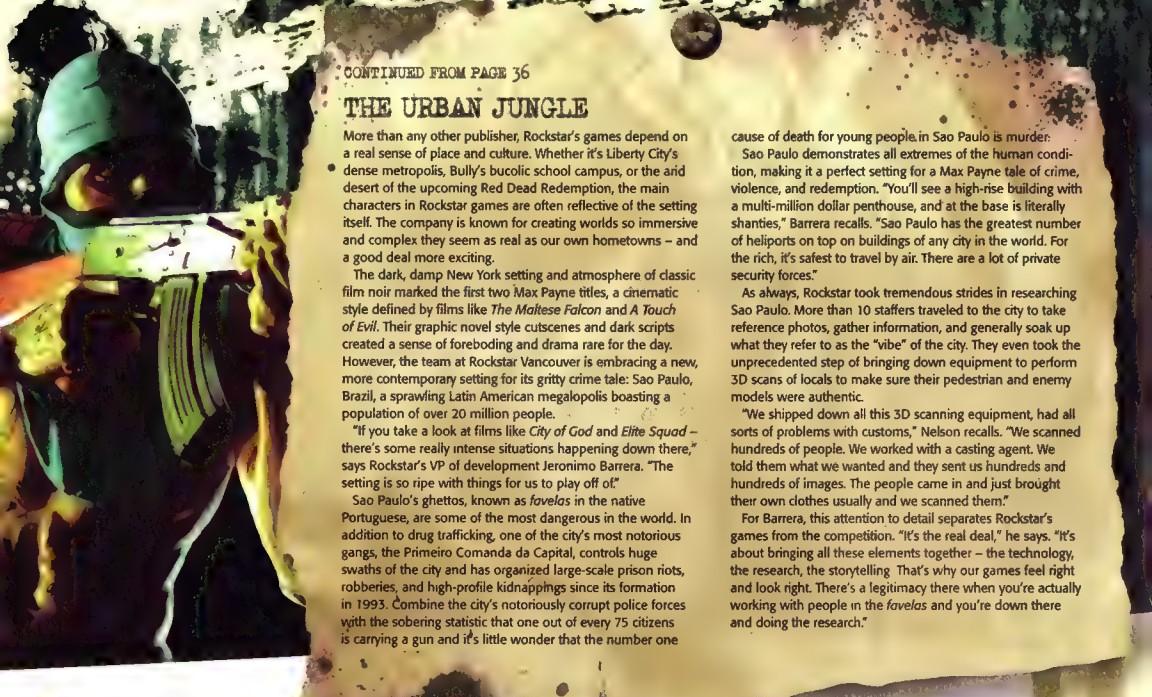
military. The murder of his wife was not a random street crime, rather a paid hit job that happened as a result of her discovering the Valkyr cover-up at her job at the District Attorney's office. After a couple more double-crosses, Max comes into contact with Senator Alfred Woden, the leader of a secret society called the "Inner Circle," who tells Max that if he can kill Nicole Horne, he will be set free from the murder charges. This leads to the grand finale, a masterful set piece that leaves Horne dead, Mona Sax apparently killed, and Max set free.

Max Payne 2 picks up two years after the events of the first game. Back in the NYPD, Max is investigating a group of serial killers for hire called the Cleaners. One day, he has a chance encounter with Mona Sax, the assassin from the first game for whom he has strong feelings. Mona is a fugitive, wanted for the murder of Senator Gates, a powerful (and possibly corrupt) Washington figurehead. Max tries to help Mona out of the jam, but she is arrested and brought into the holding cell at the station. Suddenly, a group of Cleaners raid the station, attempting to kill Mona. Mona narrowly escapes, and rendezvous with Max at her place, where they fend off another attack. After tracking some Cleaners to a construction site, Mona and Max encounter Max's partner Valerie Winterson, who holds Mona at gunpoint. Believing Mona's assertion that Valerie is there to kill her, Max shockingly shoots Valerie,

who shoots Max before she dies, wounding him. In the fracas, Mona escapes.

Proceeding further down the dark rabbit hole of conspiracy, Max learns the Cleaners work for Vladimir Lem, a Russian mafia leader who also belongs to the mysterious Inner Circle. After confronting Lem, Max discovers Mona was actually hired by the Russian Mafia to kill him. During the conversation, Lem learns that Max has killed Winterson and shoots him in retribution. Luckily, Mona arrives just in time to save Max, and they travel to Woden's mansion to protect him from Lem.

Along the way, Mona attempts to do her duty and kill Max, only to be overcome with feelings of love for him. Finally, Lem arrives and confronts Woden, who is killed when he makes a move towards Lem. Mona is shot during the struggle, leaving Max to pursue Lem through the mansion as it explodes around them from the bombs planted by Lem. The dramatic end comes after Max kills Lem in a final boss battle in a touching moment when Mona dies in Max's arms. In an intriguing twist, Mona actually lives in one alternate ending. How these events play into the plot of Max Payne 3 is unknown, but given the series' history, we expect to hear some echoes of the past in this new chapter.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

THE URBAN JUNGLE

More than any other publisher, Rockstar's games depend on a real sense of place and culture. Whether it's Liberty City's dense metropolis, Bully's bucolic school campus, or the arid desert of the upcoming Red Dead Redemption, the main characters in Rockstar games are often reflective of the setting itself. The company is known for creating worlds so immersive and complex they seem as real as our own hometowns – and a good deal more exciting.

The dark, damp New York setting and atmosphere of classic film noir marked the first two *Max Payne* titles, a cinematic style defined by films like *The Maltese Falcon* and *A Touch of Evil*. Their graphic novel style cutscenes and dark scripts created a sense of foreboding and drama rare for the day. However, the team at Rockstar Vancouver is embracing a new, more contemporary setting for its gritty crime tale: São Paulo, Brazil, a sprawling Latin American megalopolis boasting a population of over 20 million people.

"If you take a look at films like *City of God* and *Elite Squad* – there's some really intense situations happening down there," says Rockstar's VP of development Jerônimo Barrera. "The setting is so ripe with things for us to play off of."

São Paulo's ghettos, known as *favelas* in the native Portuguese, are some of the most dangerous in the world. In addition to drug trafficking, one of the city's most notorious gangs, the Primeiro Comando da Capital, controls huge swaths of the city and has organized large-scale prison riots, robberies, and high-profile kidnappings since its formation in 1993. Combine the city's notoriously corrupt police forces with the sobering statistic that one out of every 75 citizens is carrying a gun and it's little wonder that the number one

cause of death for young people in São Paulo is murder.

São Paulo demonstrates all extremes of the human condition, making it a perfect setting for a *Max Payne* tale of crime, violence, and redemption. "You'll see a high-rise building with a multi-million dollar penthouse, and at the base is literally shanties," Barrera recalls. "São Paulo has the greatest number of helipads on top of buildings of any city in the world. For the rich, it's safest to travel by air. There are a lot of private security forces."

As always, Rockstar took tremendous strides in researching São Paulo. More than 10 staffers traveled to the city to take reference photos, gather information, and generally soak up what they refer to as the "vibe" of the city. They even took the unprecedented step of bringing down equipment to perform 3D scans of locals to make sure their pedestrian and enemy models were authentic.

"We shipped down all this 3D scanning equipment, had all sorts of problems with customs," Nelson recalls. "We scanned hundreds of people. We worked with a casting agent. We told them what we wanted and they sent us hundreds and hundreds of images. The people came in and just brought their own clothes usually and we scanned them."

For Barrera, this attention to detail separates Rockstar's games from the competition. "It's the real deal," he says. "It's about bringing all these elements together – the technology, the research, the storytelling. That's why our games feel right and look right. There's a legitimacy there when you're actually working with people in the *favelas* and you're down there and doing the research."

São Paulo's ghetto districts provide a detailed, maze-like setting for *Max Payne* 3's violent gameplay





A NEW KIND OF NOIR

This begs the question: What is Max Payne, the embattled former NYPD detective, doing in São Paulo? As with any good noir, the truth is hard to discern. Rockstar is cagey when it comes to revealing spoilers, but here's what we do know.

Haunted by the tragic events of *Max Payne 2*, our hero falls into disrepute. Alcoholism and an addiction to painkillers (an addiction he still battles with, judging by the HUD on the build of the game we saw) have reduced him to a broken man. Cut loose from the NYPD, Payne spent the last 12 years of his life in a fritful downward spiral. In speaking about the game, Rockstar refers to this time period as Max's "missing years." Whether the game reveals just what happened during this time is unknown, but it's clear that this period has taken a tremendous toll on our hero both mentally and physically.

"Rock bottom" is what alcoholics call the point at which your life cannot get any worse. Max hits rock bottom in São Paulo, a city he moved to in order to escape from the demons of his life in New York. Through some somewhat disreputable connections, he's taken work in the "private security" sector for one of the city's wealthiest families. While on the job he is drawn into the dark underworld of São Paulo and becomes involved in a series of events that could cost him the last thing he has left: his life.

At first it's strange to see this new Max, heavily muscled with a beard and shaved head, trudging through the labyrinthine alleys of São Paulo. It's certainly a world away from the rain-soaked streets of New York City. Still, the team at Rockstar

Goodbye To Hollywood

While Max has been silent in the gaming world since 2003, the noir hero hit the big screen in 2008 in *Max Payne*, an action flick starring Mark Wahlberg and Mila Kunis. The film was a modest success at the box office, bringing in a little over \$85 million worldwide, but it was panned by critics and currently stands at a poor 31 rating on aggregate website Metacritic.com.

When asked about the film, it's pretty clear that the gang at Rockstar are not fans. "[The movie] is not even in the equation," says Rockstar's VP of development Jeronimo Barrera. "I haven't even seen it. Rockstar was not involved in that at all. I don't really know if I can talk about it, but they had the movie rights and made a movie of it."

The rights were sold to a production company by Remedy and 3D Realms in 2001, shortly after the release of the first PC title. Rockstar parent company Take-Two didn't purchase the intellectual property rights to the Max Payne franchise from 3D Realms until 2002, before the release of *Max Payne 2*, meaning that the company had no involvement with the film production deal.

Still, Barrera feels that the film will have little effect on the fortunes of *Max Payne 3*. "It's like most game movies," Barrera comments. "People are still playing Mario and that had a pretty terrible movie attached to it. In terms of the game, we're keeping the storylines of [Max Payne] 1 and 2. This happens in the game universe, which is where Max belongs."



feels the setting of the game is still true to the noir tenets that helped make the first two games so memorable.

"Some people say, 'Max is a noir game and it has to be black and white and in New York,'" Barrera says. "But noir is a style not necessarily a place and a color scheme. Noir is not necessarily saxophones and big dark shadows. It's looking at a world in a bleak way. That's what we're doing. It's more contemporary."

Since Max is older, the team decided against using voice actor James McCaffrey again. Instead, they plan on casting a new voice actor who can better express the toll that the years have taken on the protagonist. In recent Rockstar fashion, don't expect a big Hollywood name, but, as Nelson suggests, "We're good at [casting]." No matter the actor, Max's trademark internal monologues, which Rockstar sees as core to the franchise, will be in the game. "I can voice over some Max Payne stuff," jokes Barrera, intoning in a mock serious voice, "*I was desperate for some bullets, like the desperation of a child.*"

For Rockstar, this new setting transposes much of the franchise's trademark grittiness into a fresh new environment. "All the Max Payne themes will remain intact – manipulation, betrayal, and the stuff that really made Max Payne," Nelson claims. "Will there be nighttime levels in the rain? Probably, but level after level of that stuff would get old, so we thought it would be interesting to put him in this environment. You have the very rich living next to the very poor, and that creates a lot of tension."

More importantly, the variety and density of São Paulo makes the perfect setting for the varied and intense gameplay. Watching Max run through a *favela* shantytown with enemies

popping up from every makeshift doorway or lopsided rooftop, it's clear that the levels provide the intrigue and detail necessary for the series' trademark blazing gunplay.

"The *favelas* are like little mazes," Barrera says. "It's not like it's a one-to-one replica, but we went down there and mapped out different areas. [We] looked at the structures and how they are built and said, 'Oh, this would be fun.' Ultimately, we're building this stuff so it's fun in a Max Payne shooter, so it's got to have certain elements to make it fun to play. I don't think we would set the whole thing in the *favelas*, either; we want to give a lot of variety. Every compelling location we could find in the city we are going to use."

THE WAY OF THE GUN

Whatever the setting, the core of the Max Payne experience rests with the graceful, slow-motion gunplay that thrilled gamers upon the release of the first title. The game's Bullet Time mechanic was an innovative and addictive addition to the shooter genre, winning the game accolades from fan and critics alike. However, the feature was so successful that it now presents a distinct challenge for the team. In the eight years since the release of the original, slow-motion "focus" modes

Multiplayer MAX!

Like much of the game, the multiplayer component of *Max Payne 3* is shrouded in mystery. However, we can state unequivocally there will be online multiplayer on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and PC. Whether this multiplayer is competitive, co-op, or some new variant is unknown, but its mere presence is exciting news for a series that has never featured multiplayer before.



In Bullet Time, you'll see a remarkable level of detail – notice the individual shell casing flying from Max's gun.

While Rockstar promises some gameplay surprises, Max Payne 3 is still very centered on complex gun combat.

have become a standard of the third-person genre, present in literally dozens of successful games. How can Bullet Time evolve past its imitators without losing what made it so fun in the first place? Rockstar Vancouver plans to solve this problem the only way it knows how: with a near obsessive commitment to making sure that Max Payne 3's gameplay feels and looks exactly right.

"We're going to have Bullet Time because it's Max Payne," Barrera states. "The bigger question, since there have been so many clones of the third-person shooter with Bullet Time, is 'How do we get Max back on the throne?' For us, it's a combination of things. We're going to have Bullet Time, so it's going to be slow. Now you're going to have to see all the nice little nuances that these machines can do."

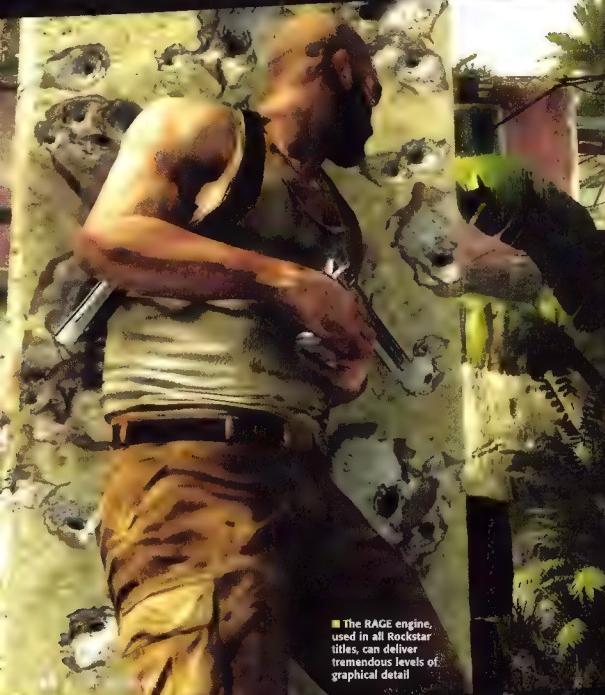
The team is using the company's RAGE engine, coupled with the NaturalMotion Euphoria animation technology that was so successfully utilized in GTA IV. By blending motion-capture with NaturalMotion's procedural animations, the team has created a game that both looks and feels remarkably realistic. As you watch the game, the attention to detail is remarkable. If Max jumps sideways towards a crate (which is fully destructible like many of the objects in the environment), you'll see his hand reach down to support his weight so he can vault over it. When he lands, you'll feel a sensation of Max's new bulk as he hits the dirt. The animation system is clearly important to the team. During our interview, Rob Nelson was on his feet, miming jumps left and right with two imaginary pistols drawn, at one point crouching behind the couch to demonstrate the game's new cover system.

Yes, Max Payne 3 does feature cover, but Rockstar is quick to point out that it's merely another option for the player, not the focus of the game. "The way that you experience this world

isn't just 'Take cover, shoot, and move to the next piece of cover,'" Nelson says. "We want to make the experience very detailed. It's similar to GTA IV. We could have gone bigger, but it was decided to go with more density. We're focusing the attention on every little motion he makes." Another source of cover comes in the form of human shields, which you can take at any time. The team is working hard on this mechanic, making sure that Max can target and move effectively while taking a hostage.

"We took all the elements of the traditional Max and expanded it out so the game becomes gun ballet, or 'gun-fu,' or whatever you want to call it," Barrera interjects. "We have cover in the game but you don't have to use it. You can approach the levels however you want to approach them. The AI will have scripts that run to set-up events, but they also have their own brains, so it's a little bit different each time."

While the core Bullet Time mechanics are being refined to present an even more fluid gameplay package, the team is also using slow-motion techniques in new ways, internally called "Environmental Bullet Time." Basically these moments are similar to the quick-time events that occur in many third-person action games, but with a difference. The player has full control at all times, and is able to use the slowed down tempo



The RAGE engine, used in all Rockstar titles, can deliver tremendous levels of graphical detail.

of Bullet Time to pull off maneuvers that would be too difficult at full speed. One example Rockstar revealed occurs in the *favela*. After vaulting over a wall, Max slides down a tin roof, artfully picking off enemies on each side as he descends. While Rockstar says most of the game is still primarily focused on gunplay, Barrera did hint at more "surprises" in store for players in the form of special set pieces.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

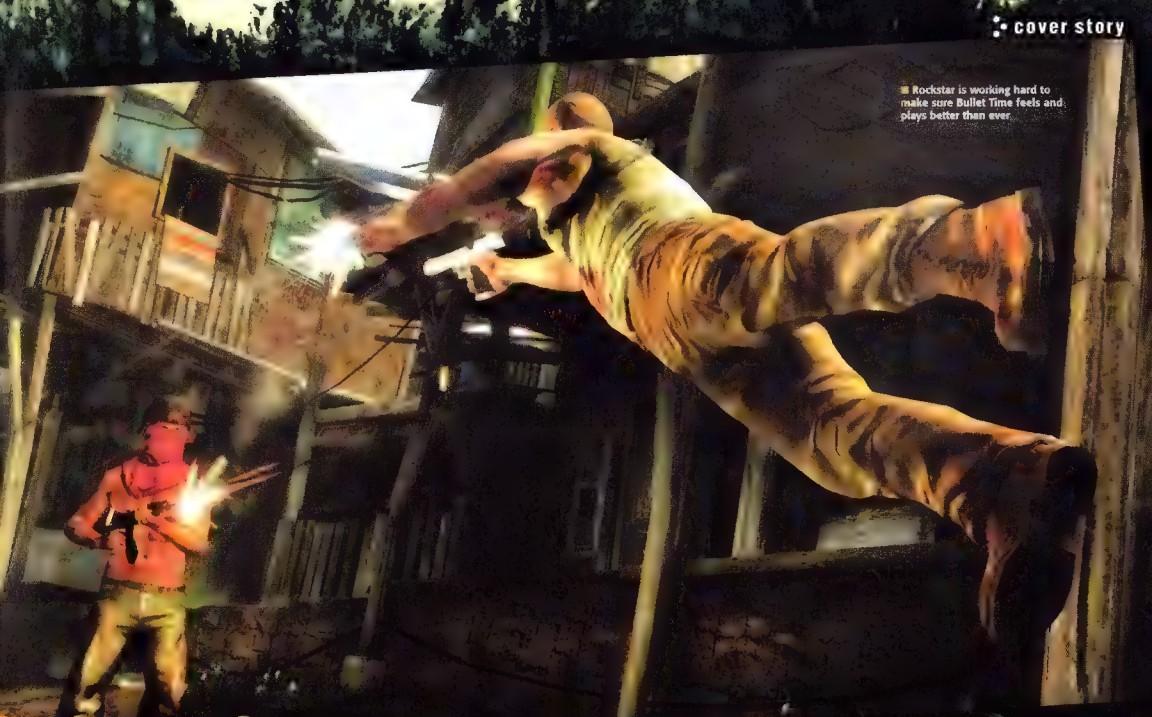
While there's still much we don't know about the game, seeing the game in action made us hopeful that the finished product will live up to both the standards of the series and Rockstar Games in general. In this more focused game design, the RAGE engine is capable of a remarkable amount of detail. Seeing Max walk through a series of shantytown alleys, it's clear why Rockstar was so adamant that São Paulo was the only place to tell this new chapter in the saga. The buildings are in various states of decay. We observe crumbling brick linked together with rusted aluminum and rotting wood. The precarious structures tower two and three stories above the street, providing innumerable hiding spots for the enemies that pop out of every turn. While it's by no stretch an open world game, Max does have the ability to climb up and down shorter walls, which allows you to take alternate routes of attack as in Rockstar Vancouver's *The Warriors*.

As Max dispatches enemies with arcing slow-motion dives, you notice little details like the shower of shells ejecting from his weapon and the slow back and forth of the pistol's firing mechanism. As we hit a foe a story above us, his knees buckle on the ledge before he swan dives towards the ground. At key moments, the game enters into a striking "Bullet Cam" mode, where the viewing angle whips around and we follow the bullet up close as it penetrates an enemy's arm.

After a dive, the game even accounts for Max's realistic movement on the ground. Instead of magically popping up, you can fire with one hand as Max props himself up with the other, rotating his trunk around to target an enemy on the other side. This ability to shoot from the ground can be a lifesaver in



Rockstar is working hard to make sure Bullet Time feels and plays better than ever.



many cases. You can actually revive yourself from a kill shot by getting off one accurate bullet just as the screen fades to black around you. If your last shot hits your murderer, you'll receive an adrenaline boost to survive.

While all the little details help add a sense of place and realism to the game, the strengths of Max Payne 3 are still those that helped carry the first two entries to success. It's a no-holds-barred shooter that retains a laser-like focus on gunplay. So far, the game seems to have this crucial element nearly perfected.

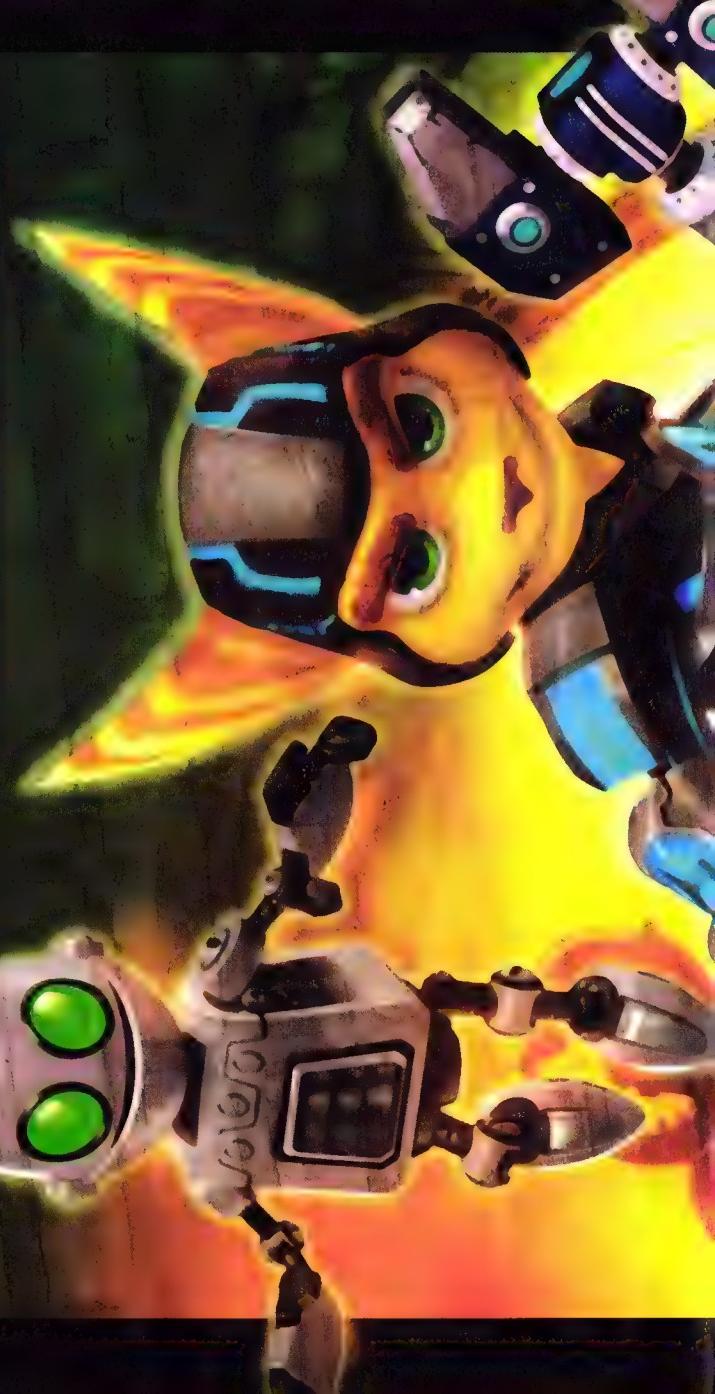
"The first thing was, let's make the shooting fun and the reactions fun," Barrera says. "We wanted that core mechanic to be solid from day one. You don't want a shooter where it's not satisfying. Every gunshot needs to [feel right] – whether you're hitting the guy or not. Max communicates to the world via his weapons, so you want to be able to have the craziest reactions. You want it to seem like you're really in the world. If a guy is running from you and you shoot him in the foot, you want him to react in the proper way. If you're shooting a guy with a machine gun, you want him to get riddled with bullets and shake."

In many ways, Max Payne 3 typifies Rockstar's approach to game making. By combining ultra-violent action with dark, real world themes, the developers hope to make a game that's as compelling as the gritty cult films that the company draws its inspirations from. Though he's been missing in action for years, Max Payne is still very much a part of Rockstar's vision for gaming. Despite Max's weathered appearance and the story's exotic locale, Barrera hopes that the game can live up to the dramatic, visceral thrills of the original games.

"It's part of the evolution," he observes. "In a lot of people's memories, Max Payne, at the time it came out, was the nearest thing we had to art in games. It was technically awesome. It was fun to play. The story was compelling, and the presentation was above what anyone else was doing. So we have to work on those core elements. [But] Max has moved on. This is a new environment and the ongoing tale of his life." ■■■



RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: CRACK IN TIME



>>>

FINISHING THE STOKE

For years, Ratchet & Clank has been one of most reliably entertaining franchises in video games. The addictive blend of powerful weapons, humor, and endearing characters, vibrant worlds, and pitched action is always captivating. But after eight successful installments, developer Insomniac Games faces a unique dilemma: How do you keep things fresh after such a long run?

A Crack in Time is the culmination of the Ratchet & Clank Future saga.

Explaining creative director Brian Allgeier: "It's going to answer many of the big questions that came up in both Tools of Destruction and Quiesce. You will learn what happened to Clank, his connection to the Zonals, and more about Ratchet's past. In the Future storyline, our heroes have struggled with issues of their origins and this new installment answers those questions once and for all."

PLAYSTATION 3
 > STYLE: 3D ACTION
 > PUBLISHER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
 > DEVELOPER: INSOMNIAC
 > RELEASE: FALL



The mysterious Lombax named Azimuth is the first character of that race players will have met, other than Ratchet



In Tools of Destruction, Ratchet turned down a chance to reunite with his long-lost fellow Lombaxes, and Clank had strange visitations from the robotic Zoni. Quest for Booty found Ratchet in pursuit of Clank after the worshipful Zoni swept him away to parts unknown. The game's ending revealed Clank's location, but didn't reunite the two friends, so A Crack in Time begins with the heroes separated.

"Our fans have had a ton of questions about Ratchet and Clank's pasts ever since we began the series, and we're really excited to finally answer these questions," Allgeier reveals. "They've been wondering for the last two years about the Lombaxes and if Ratchet would ever find another one. He meets Azimuth, who has been in hiding for many years and serves as a mentor for Ratchet. He reveals many things about his past that I think may surprise many players. Combine that with everyone's favorite villain, Dr. Nefarious (and Lawrence) and a healthy side helping of self-proclaimed 'superhero' Captain Qwark. We think that longtime fans will really appreciate a story that brings back some old favorite

characters as well as introduces new characters that reveal more about Ratchet and Clank's pasts."

While many story details remain under wraps, it's clear that time plays a big part in both the plot and the gameplay. "Ratchet and Clank team that Dr. Nefarious is attempting to tamper with time itself," Allgeier says. "We've never fully explored time as a gameplay element in previous R&C games, and I think fans will be pleasantly surprised by some of the cool mechanics that this game introduces to the franchise."

Throughout the series, fans have always gotten a kick out of the dedicated Clank levels, and A Crack in Time is no exception, messing with time is now its central mechanic. "Clank will have to solve puzzles by using recordings of himself to get through various puzzles," Allgeier tells us. "The challenge comes in timing the other recordings correctly, and then re-recording the Clanks as you get into the tougher puzzles. It sounds complicated when I describe it, but it's actually really fun and intuitive to play. It's one of the new features we're most excited by here in the office."

The bulk of new features are being reserved for the action-centric Ratchet levels. As always, Insomniac is adding new weapons to add to Ratchet's ever-growing arsenal. Allgeier lists some of his favorites: "There's the Cyclone Gun, which can be used to pull out these discs that will seek out enemies and instantly freeze them, leaving them open to Ratchet's attacks. There's also the Sonic Eruptor, which is a fancy name for a bloated creature held by a harness. When Ratchet fires, he squeezes it to let loose a massive burping sound. It can be repeatedly used to create lots of damage and some bellyches. However, the damage for this weapon is maximized through timing the firing to onsets." As big sniper rifle fans, we also love the net Striker – an energy weapon crossbow with a scope has a special sensor that can detect enemy weak spots." Ratchet also has access to several new tools to make up for the absence of his robotic buddy. One of the coolest of these appears to be the new Hoverboots. With his new footwear in place, Ratchet has access to an array of jumps and acrobatic moves as he explores the planets of the game.

If new weapons and equipment are a foregone conclusion, the new space combat and exploration sectors are a welcome surprise. Where previous entries in the series focused on exploration with your ship, in A Crack in Time opens up entire star systems, which can be explored and even fought with your ship. In addition to dogfight-like space battles, the sprawling reaches of outer space yield hidden collectibles and upgrades.

Outer space isn't the only environment to branch out into a more free form structure. Ground levels are now far more open than before, giving players a chance to choose the paths they want to pursue and shape their own progression through a stage. "We had a lot of positive feedback to our more non-linear levels like Sargasso in Tools of Destruction and the Merdegrave area in Quest for Booty," Allgeier says. "We wanted to continue to give players larger levels that encourage exploration and experimentation."

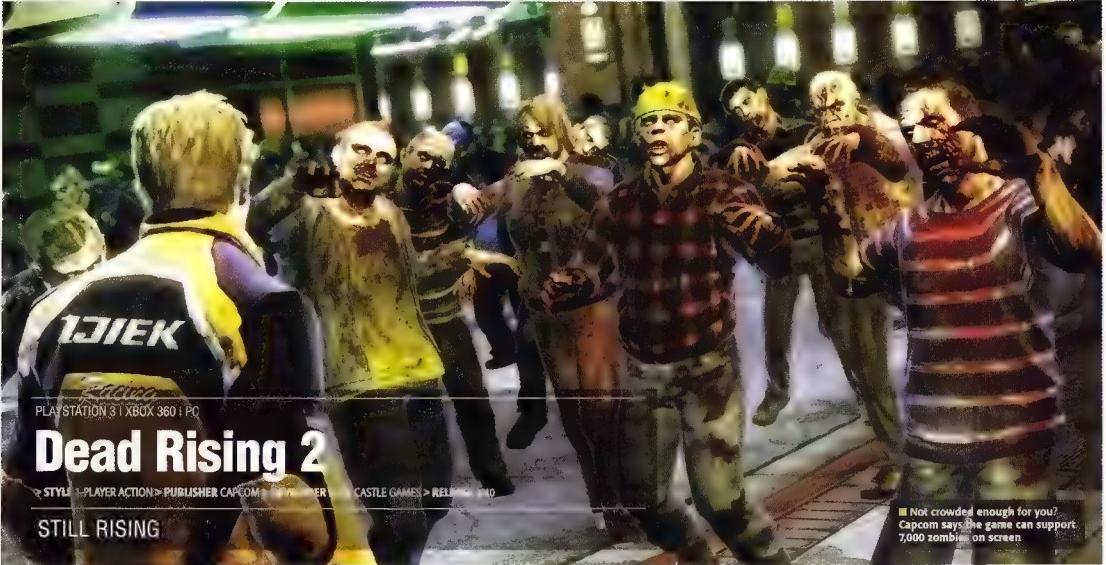
It'd be disingenuous to suggest that Ratchet & Clank is seeing a complete overhaul with the introduction of A Crack in Time. Then again, this is one series where dramatic reinventions are rarely called for. New weapons, refined gameplay, and an evolution of story have been recipes for success in a series that has been one of the most crowd-pleasing in Sony's lineup ever since 2002. The developers at Insomniac Games have shown time and again their ability to make the formula behind Ratchet & Clank feel fresh and new through clever innovation and stellar level design. Unless that track record goes askew, we can expect A Crack in Time to be another sure bet. ■■■



"Our goal is to capture the same heartfelt emotion found in CG animated movies," explains creative director Brian Allgeier



■ Some of the previous iterations of Ratchet & Clank included multiplayer. While it has yet to be confirmed this time around, we suspect some interesting announcements might be on the way



Dead Rising 2

► STYLE ► 1-PLAYER ACTION ► PUBLISHER CAPCOM ► DEVELOPER REINFORCED GAMES ► CASTLE GAMES ► RELEASE DATE Q4 2010

STILL RISING

One of the design mantras in Dead Rising 2 is, unsurprisingly, "Zombies, zombies, zombies." The first game, which debuted shortly after the Xbox 360's debut, served as an example of the new hardware's capabilities. Resident Evil games threw a dozen or so undead creatures at players at any given time — functional, though not overwhelming. Dead Rising was a revelation, throwing players in a shopping mall filled with up to 500 zombies simultaneously, according to Capcom's Keiji Inafune. Dead Rising 2 brings the number of brain

munchers even higher.

"One of the advantages we actually had on this game was being able to write an engine from scratch for this," says Dan Brady, the game's manager and producer. "We simply weren't stuck with the limitations of having an engine that had to be, to a degree, watered down for multiple titles." What's the payoff? Up to 7,000 moaning zombies hungry for your blood on the streets of Fortune City.

Aside from the new setting — which Brady likens more to Reno than Vegas — one of

the biggest changes for the sequel is the introduction of a new hero, Chuck Greene, a tough guy in a motorcycle jacket. Frank West, the photojournalist from the first game, isn't in Dead Rising 2 as far as we can tell. Since Greene isn't much of a shutterbug, the photography elements aren't in the sequel, either. "The original Dead Rising was about Frank West, who was a cameraman," Inafune explains. "But it's not like if zombies were to one day rule the world or overcome the world that only cameramen would be surviving."

Like West, Chuck can use improvised weapons like bats, cash registers, and guitars, which is nice but nothing we didn't see in the first game. The sequel adds even more over-the-top items, including a stuffed moose head that can be worn (allowing Greene to charge into crowds and destroy zombies with his newfound antlers), a dirtbike, and even a roulette wheel. Not enough for you? Fine. Greene can also wield ridiculous weapons like the paddlesaw, which is a canoe paddle with chainsaws attached at each end. Wielded like a monstrous bo staff, it lets Greene wade through zombie hordes unscathed. Another item is a bucket with several drills protruding through it. Plop it on a zombie's head and watch it dissolve in a gush of red gravy. For the demo's grand finale, Chuck hops onto a modified version of his dirtbike with chainsaws fastened to the handlebars and rides straight into a crowd of zombies.

The makeshift nature of the weapons makes it seem as though the game features a weapon-crafting system. We're interested to learn if Greene is a do-it-yourself kind of guy, or if he has to recruit help from someone more handy. Capcom's being coy about this functionality at this time, but Inafune poses the question, "How often have you found drills sticking into buckets?"

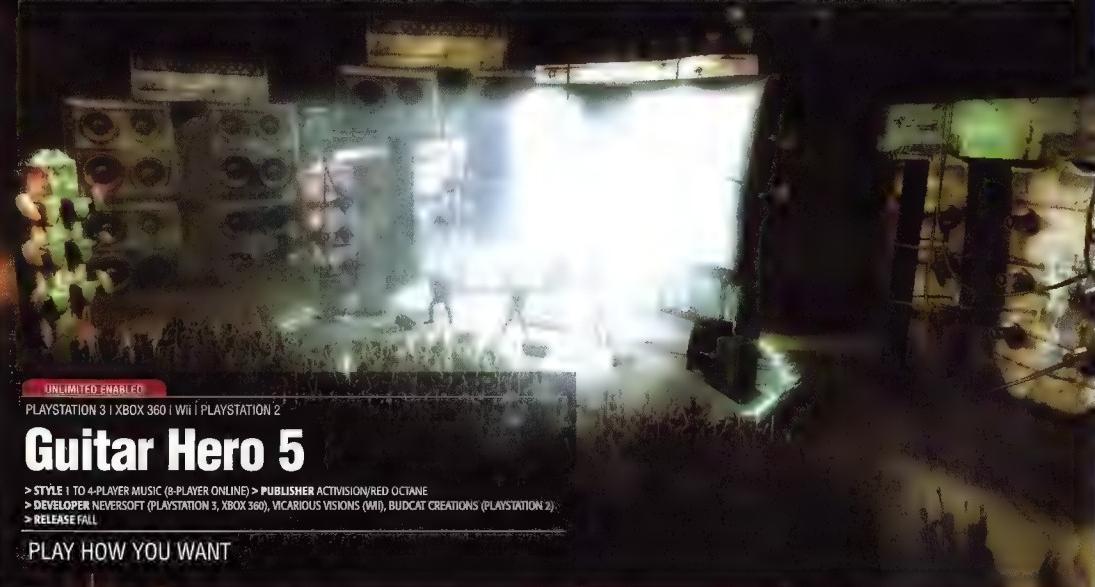
The one widespread complaint about the first game was the save system. "I'm going to confirm that we are fixing that problem. There's no doubt about it, we're doing some interesting stuff there," Brady teases. "We still want to keep the sense of dread in this whole thing, but we don't think there's going to be any complaints with the system we're creating this time."

So far, Dead Rising 2 has all the elements to make a worthy sequel: more zombies, new weapons, and a cool setting. We'll miss the mall, but the new setting is a gamble that might just pay off big. ■ ■ ■

While Chuck's welcome to push zombies away with a broom, he can also keep them at a distance by moving while shooting.







PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII | PLAYSTATION 2

Guitar Hero 5

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER MUSIC (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION/RED OCTANE
> DEVELOPER NEVERSOFT (PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360), VICARIOUS VISIONS (WII), BUDCAT CREATIONS (PLAYSTATION 2)
> RELEASE FALL

PLAY HOW YOU WANT

There's no denying that music gamers have a lot of choices on their hands these days. The choices are only going to become more abundant this fall. Neversoft appears to be aware of the stiff competition, and is putting together the next numbered installment of *Guitar Hero* to deliver in all the ways that count: a huge new setlist plus a wealth of new gameplay modes and features.

Many of the coolest ideas in *Guitar Hero* 5 revolve around giving players the freedom to interact with the game in any way they choose. This philosophy is personified by Party Play mode. You can establish a continuous set list, which begins to play whether you're on an instrument or not. "While it's running, anybody can grab any of the instrument controllers and just push one button to jump right in and play without stopping the music," says Brian Bright, project director. "Other players can grab any other controller

and join you. The highways will scale and morph into the respective positions, but the music never stops. On the flip side, people can also drop out without having to stop the music. If the controllers aren't touched for a while the players get auto dropped and the game continues in Party Play mode. Also, there is no failing in this mode, so it's perfect for new players to jump right in as well as for veteran *Guitar Hero* parties."

Another barrier is broken with the stratified instrument choice. No longer are players bound to have one guitarist, one bassist, one drummer, and a vocalist. Any combination works — if you want to have a four-guitar rock-out party, go for it. No matter your combination of instruments, players should be happy to hear that every track in the game is unlocked from the very beginning, letting folks jump right in on their favorite artists and songs.

Group play isn't the only area seeing a

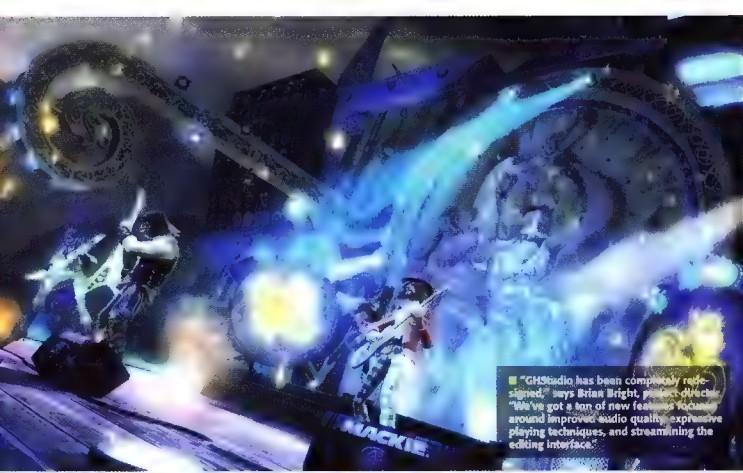
revamp — dedicated career players can expect some additional goodies to flesh out their playthrough. All the songs in the Career mode have a unique bonus challenge attached to them. "It may be 'Score X points while in Star Power,' or 'Whammy for X seconds.' We've got three levels of difficulty for the challenges, modeled after the Gold, Diamond, and Platinum records," Bright tells us. "Each challenge earns you more stars for progression, but also unlocks something special, like a secret character, special instrument, secret venue, or even things like Lars' World of Warcraft-inspired Viking outfit."

While many gamers will return to the cooperative band play of previous entries, Neversoft has worked hard this time to flesh out some compelling competitive game modes. These "Rockfest" game types allow two to eight players to play in team-based and individual battles. Our favorite is the new Momentum mode. "Everyone begins on the

same instrument, on the medium difficulty," Bright explains. "Every 20 notes you hit in a row raises your difficulty up, and every 3 notes missed drops your difficulty down. So you can climb up to expert and then flub it and find yourself back down at beginner."

What about compatibility with older titles? Neversoft assures us that all your download tracks from *World Tour* will be available for play in *Guitar Hero* 5. As for the disc-based songs from *World Tour* and other *Guitar Hero* games, we're told that the possibility is being looked into, but Activision is making no announcements yet. Even with the proven success of the *Guitar Hero* formula, Neversoft continues to make its mark on the series by exploring new concepts and enhancing gamers' ability to rock out. ■■■





"GHS studio has been completely redesigned," says Brian Bright, project director. "We've got a ton of new features: vacuum管模拟, surround studio quality, expressive playing techniques, and streamlining the editing interface."



■ Players will have to rock, metal, or whatever it takes to succeed. If someone reaches a certain level of success, a new revival meter will appear, and the other players will have to work to pull that meter into the green.

THE FULL BAND LIST AND THE FIRST TWENTY TWO SONGS

- Vampire Weekend "A-Punk"
- Bob Dylan "All Along The Watchtower"
- The Killers "All The Pretty Faces"
- Arctic Monkeys "Brianstorm"
- Tom Petty "Runnin' Down A Dream"
- Elton John "Saturday Night's Alright (For Fighting)"
- Wolfmother "Round"
- Kings Of Leon "Sex On Fire"
- Johnny Cash "Ring Of Fire"
- The Duke Spirit "Send A Little Love Token"
- Blink-182 "The Rock Show"
- Santana "No One To Depend On (Live)"
- Children Of Bodom "Done With Everything, Die For Nothing"
- Attack! Attack! UK "You And Me"
- TV On The Radio "Wolf Like Me"
- Iron Maiden "2 Minutes To Midnight"
- A Perfect Circle "Midnight"
- Judith "Judas"
- Love and Rockets "Mirror People"
- Face To Face "Disconnected"
- The White Stripes "Blue Orchid"
- Stevie Wonder "Superstition"
- The Rolling Stones "Sympathy For The Devil"
- Jimmy Eat World "Darker My Love"
- Public Enemy featuring Zakk Wylde "Smashing Pumpkins"
- Band Of Horses "We're Going To Be Friends"
- Bush "Billy Idol"
- Thrice "White
- Darkest Hour
- Peter Frampton
- Rammstein
- No Doubt
- David Bowie
- Gorillaz
- Beck
- Beastie Boys
- Duran Duran
- John Mellencamp
- Screaming Trees
- Coldplay
- Spacelab
- Sonic Youth
- Thin Lizzy
- 3 Doors Down
- Elliot Smith
- Nirvana
- Billy Squier
- Mötley Crüe
- Iggy Pop
- The Sword
- Queens Of The Stone Age
- AFI
- Kaiser Chiefs
- My Morning Jacket
- Garbage
- Wild Cherry
- Muse
- Sunny Day Real Estate
- Kiss
- The Bronx
- Nirvana
- Rose Hill Drive
- The Police
- Blur
- Brand New
- Rush
- The Ractoners
- Gov't Mule
- Megadeth
- King Crimson
- Scars On Broadway
- T. Rex
- Queen & David Bowie
- Eagles Of Death Metal
- Grand Funk Railroad
- Sublime
- Weezer
- Deep Purple
- Bon Jovi
- The Derek Trucks Band
- Dire Straits
- Jeff Beck
- Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers



PLAYSTATION 3

Heavy Rain

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
> DEVELOPER QUANTIC DREAM > RELEASE EARLY 2010

THE REAL DEAL

If other games took a similar marketing approach to Heavy Rain, we might forget about them. Announced back in 2006, Sony has shown little of Quantic Dream's dark thriller aside from a pair of tech demos. Four years into development and still no gameplay? Sounds risky. Yet somehow, the title's reclusive nature only made us want to see it more. Finally, Sony acquiesced.

Heavy Rain features four main characters who are connected by a rash of high-profile murders. Norman Jayden, an FBI agent sent to the east coast to investigate the brutal "Origami" slayings, takes the lead in our demo. Jayden's natural investigative skills are augmented by a Pentagon-developed device called the Added Reality Interface, A.R.I. for short. Comprised of a pair of glasses and a glove, the device locates and analyzes organic and synthetic traces. Jayden is a walking crime lab, but his cool toys and government ties don't mean he's without vices. In traditional flawed-hero fashion, Jayden is addicted to a drug called Triptocaine, and the debilitating withdrawal symptoms won't let him get clean.

Jayden's quest to track down the Origami Killer leads to a junkyard manager, dubiously named Mad Jack, who may have stolen a car tied to one of the murders. In the junkyard we're introduced to the thought/decision system. Each character's consciousness is divided amongst several thoughts at any given time, and these thoughts are represented visually. Standing in the rain Jayden thinks of the cold, Triptocaine, withdrawal, and an undisclosed character named Shaun. Selecting one of these options makes us

privy to his inner dialogue on the subject. The same mechanic is used for initiating conversations, and also represents the character's state of mind. Thoughts and potential decisions move quicker, become blurry, or disappear when the character is agitated or under pressure.

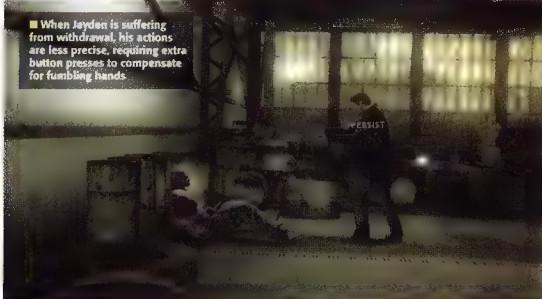
Jayden asks Mad Jack about the missing car but it does him little good. Instead, Jayden sneaks into the chop shop and takes advantage of his high-tech devices. The glove reveals a hint of orchid pollen in the air. The glasses magnify tread marks and hastily cleaned blood on the floor. A quick touch of the glove to the sample confirms its human origin. The blood leads to an acid bath where bones lurk below the surface. Unfortunately, Jack witnesses Jayden's discovery and a struggle ensues.

The fight unfolds through a flurry of contextual button presses. Eventually Jayden corners Jack with his own firearm and we find out that he was just on cleanup duty, tasked with destroying the car and disposing of the body. Then Jayden's withdrawal hits. In less than a minute Jayden's flat on his back, Jack grinning toothily above him.

Much of Heavy Rain is still a mystery. Aside from the quicktime events, we can't attest to the game's other gameplay devices. Since Jayden's A.R.I. device is contextual to his profession, we assume that the remaining characters also bring something unique to the table. Quantic Dream claims Heavy Rain breaks all of the traditional gameplay conventions and delivers something completely original. We sure hope it does. ■ ■ ■



■ Heavy Rain looks as stunning as ever. Everything we saw unfolded in real time; nothing was pre-rendered

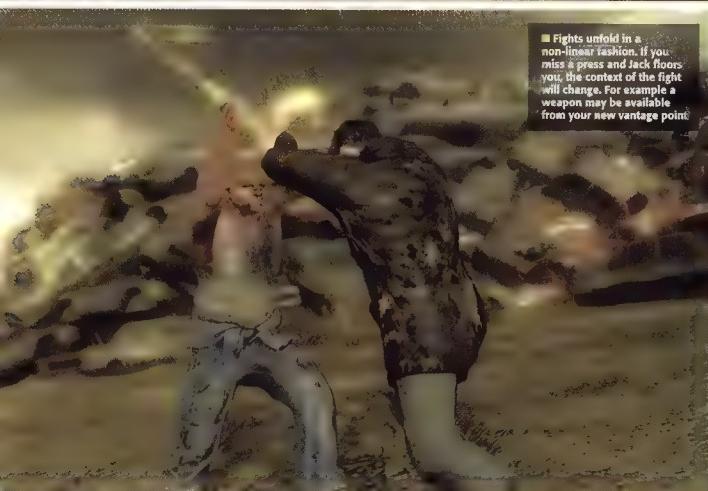


■ When Jayden is suffering from withdrawal, his actions are less precise, requiring extra button presses to compensate for fumbling hands



SIX FEET UNDER

Quantic Dream has touted from the get-go that death in Heavy Rain is permanent. If one of the four characters dies in the course of the game you will lose all of the perspectives of that character for the remainder of the game. This might panic completionists out there, but we confirmed with Quantic Dream that reverting to an older save will avoid the loss. Still, they encourage players to own up to the ramifications of their decisions. The goal is to trigger feelings of empathy, sadness, and love, not just adrenaline and fear.



■ Fights unfold in a non-linear fashion. If you miss a fight or two, your context of the game will change. For example a weapon may be available from your new vantage point.

■ Quantum Dream dished that Heavy Rain will cap at 8-10 hours of play.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Singularity

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION > DEVELOPER RAVEN SOFTWARE > RELEASE 2009

TIME IS APPARENTLY GREEN



We already knew about Singularity's Time Manipulation Device, which allows players to move objects along their own personal timeline, and the modern sci-fi thriller plotline, which has an amoral Russian millionaire trying to revive disastrous experiments from Stalin's time. It's the new combat details that have us interested now.

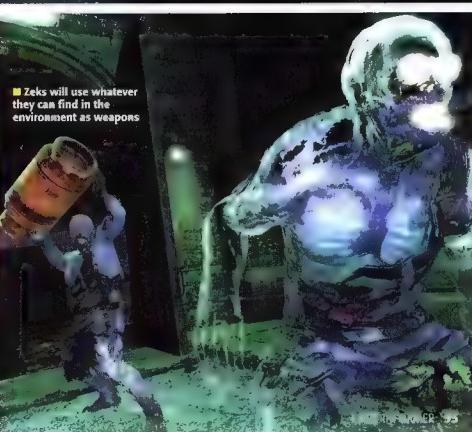
Two newly revealed elements promise to give players more interesting choices in battle. By manipulating the environment or enemies using the TMD, players can set up conflicts and take advantage of the chaos. The time-phased creatures that inhabit Singularity's island locale and the Russian Spetsnaz antagonists are as hostile to each other as they are to the player. Letting them thin each other out can be a powerful tactic.

Soul Leeches are an enemy we haven't seen before. These nasty little airborne creatures attack in swarms, attempting to latch onto a human and take over his body. Should they be successful, the victim becomes a Zek — a phasing monstrosity that attacks

the Soul Leeches' enemies. The trick is to distract dormant Leeches while Spetsnaz are nearby, creating a situation much easier to deal with than taking on either the creatures or the Russians individually.

Zeks are humanoid beasts that possess a primitive, feral intelligence and prefer to attack in packs. Some fling everything from barrels to pipes or wrenches at their foes at range, while others charge into melee to tear enemies to bits with powerful strikes. Unfortunately for their human prey, they can temporarily phase out of time, becoming immune to normal attacks. One can surmise that special weapons like the E99 pistol — a powerful gun that fires an explosive slug that can be guided from a third-person camera — might get around this restriction, however.

It's good to see some more information that separates Singularity from the sci-fi action-thriller pack. We're looking forward to seeing what other tricks Raven has up its collective sleeve in the months leading up to the game's launch ■ ■ ■





Madden NFL 10 marks the return of gameplay sliders, which allow players to tailor the game to their liking.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Madden NFL 10

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS > DEVELOPER EA TIBURON
> RELEASE AUGUST 14

BRINGING THE NOISE

Since the NFL exclusivity agreement with EA Sports began in 2004, the legend of Madden rival ESPN NFL 2K5 has grown to epic proportions. Its online seasons, television quality presentation, and realistic gameplay are now viewed as sacred features, especially in light of the fumbled Madden NFL 06 next-gen console debut that soured fans with missing modes and awkward gameplay. In the years since, EA Tiburon has incrementally rebuilt Madden's reputation, but talk of 2K5 continues to haunt the team. With Madden NFL 10, lead designer Ian Cummings hopes to finally put the game's now defunct competition in the rearview mirror for good. "I study the hell out of [NFL 2K5] now because I personally don't want people to ever be able to compare us to them any more," he says.

The most stunning new feature debuting in Madden NFL 10 is the Pro-Tack system, a procedural animation technology that allows up to nine players to gang up on tackles. As a runner fights for that extra yard, defenders flock to the ball to stop his momentum and bring him down. This speed of the defensive response really separates good defenses like the Ravens from weaker groups like the Lions; poor defenses will give big backs like Brandon Jacobs time to break free from the tackle before other defenders arrive to help. Offensive players can also push the pile to help guide the running back's momentum in short-yardage situations, giving him the extra inch needed for the first down or touchdown.

This new momentum-based technology also extends to the trenches, where offensive

lineman now steer pass rushers around the field, resulting in a more realistic passing pocket. Players controlling pass rushers on defense must fight for leverage by using the right analog stick to gain the upper hand rather than hitting a swim move or bull rush button as in previous versions. As the pocket collapses around the quarterback, the controller rumbles, indicating it's time to get rid of the ball. To buy more time, players can use the new quarterback evasion moves tied to the right analog stick to sidestep or break free from a defender's grasp.

To complete its evolution of how the pocket works, EA is attempting to rid the game of unrealistic 15-yard dropbacks. Tiburon has implemented true dropback animations to simulate real NFL quarterback drops. Depending on the play, signal callers will automatically take three, five, or seven-step drops to the natural throwing position, eliminating the need for players to hold back on the analog stick to guide their QB to a safe throwing location.

Other big features seeing their debut in Madden include two-player online co-op games versus the CPU with position specific camera angles, the Wildcat formation made famous by last year's Miami Dolphins, and The Extra Point highlight show hosted by NFL Network's Fran Charles and Alex Flanagan, which recaps the week's action in your franchise mode. The list of new game features is impressive, but only time spent on the gridiron will determine if Madden NFL 10 is primed to put those longing memories of NFL 2K5 to rest. ■■■

■ EA has spent a lot of time making sure the game looks authentic from refs and chain gangs on the field to the types of gloves the players wear.



TAKE YOUR FRANCHISE ONLINE!

For years Madden fans have begged fruitlessly for an online franchise mode. Finally, Tiburon is answering their call. Madden NFL 10 is the first title in the series to include a full online franchise mode, complete with up to 32 teams, real NFL schedules, full stat tracking, player transactions, and live drafts. To aid players in tending to their franchise, EA allows them to do everything from changing depth charts to offering trades through a PC browser or a downloadable iPhone app.



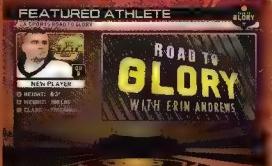
MADDEN NFL GETS FACELIFT

Rather than offering Wii owners a watered-down version of the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 versions of Madden, EA is striving to create a football experience tailored to the unique control scheme. The most readily apparent new feature is the cartoon-style art direction, but the game boasts several other Wii-specific features like the 5-on-5 Madden Showdown mode, co-op Huddle Up mode, and Call Your Shots audio system, which extends to defensive play calls this year.





The new Player Lock system allows you to play from the perspective of one skill player on offense or any defender in dynasty mode or during exhibition games.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NCAA Football 10

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS
> DEVELOPER EA TIBURON > RELEASE JULY 14

LET THE RIVALRY BEGIN

NCAA Football 09 takes back College legend, its version of Be A Pro, but this year EA has renamed the mode Road to Glory. Much of the mode remains the same, but ESPN sideline reporter Erin Andrews now chronicles your high school phenom to a college football legend. During make-or-break moments in your career – such as a day record-setting performance, postseason award shows, and end of your career – Andrews has a report to discuss your achievements complete with interviews, photos, and highlights of your most memorable plays from time to time, color analysis, and lots of love. Andrews is determined to impact on college football, and added interaction with the media could help players feel they are making a real impact on their football programs and give solid team support, and we're sure it will.

On the field, NCAA 10 features many of the gameplay tweaks found in Madden NFL 10, including wide-receiver/defensive back jostling, head tracking, and new pocket animations. In addition, Tiburon is introducing a new game planning mode that allows players to tailor their team's aggressiveness across 11 strategic fronts. For example, if you instruct your receivers to gamble for the big play instead of the secure catch, they gain a break tackle bonus but have a harder time hauling in tough catches.

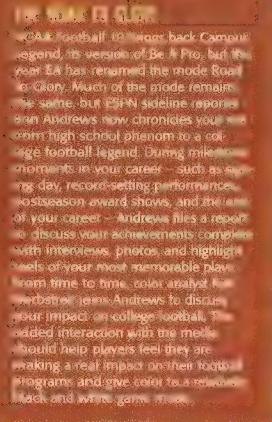
To let gamers go with their gut feelings during intense games, NCAA 10 also introduces a new Defensive Keys system. If your opponent frequently dives up the middle on short yardage situations, you can gamble at the line of scrimmage and tell your defense to play the dive up the middle. If you correctly predict the call, your defense will swarm the ballcarrier and make the big stop. If he fools you with a play-action pass, your team will be caught out of position and may possibly give up a big play.

Perhaps the most powerful tweak to the NCAA Football formula is the new adaptive AI system. Though this term has been bandied about before, Tiburon insists this is an entirely new logic system that reacts to your on-field decision-making. If you're continually gouging your opponent up the middle, the defense will make the necessary adjustments to take away the middle. If you're moving a star receiver around the formation to spring him on deep routes, the defense makes note of your adjustments and alters its coverage accordingly. Once a defense is keyed on a particular play, players can take advantage of their preoccupation by hitting them with a counter play, such as a play-action pass. The new playbook links plays to indicate when a team is ripe for exploitation and recommends the perfect play to take advantage of them.

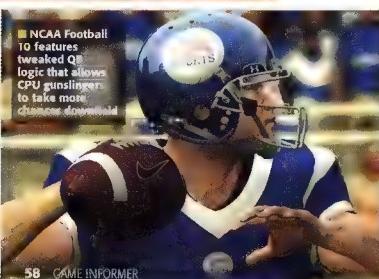
To find out if these new features take NCAA Football to the next level, look for our review in the August issue. ■ ■ ■

WHERE'S YOUR SCHOOL? RIGHT HERE

Does your college lack a football program? With No. 13's new TeamBuilder, schools like Jack Kerouac's School of Disembodied Poets can finally field a team. Tiburon's new create-a-school application goes deeper than any creation mode before it, allowing gamers to customize school colors, uniforms, fight songs, stadiums, and player names directly from a PC browser to be imported to their console. Each player can keep up to 12 user-created teams on his or her console at once, allowing everyone to use their teams in online battles. And, of course, supports franchise customization.



NCAA Football 10 features tweaked QOL logic that allows CPU gunslingers to take more damage during dropdowns.



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Wii

Red Steel 2

> STYLE 1 PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER UBISOFT
 > DEVELOPER UBISOFT PARIS > RELEASE WINTER

SECOND SWING

Some of us were born with a taste for the thrill of sword combat. As children, anything we put in our hands – from branches to broomsticks – inevitably became a dangerous weapon. This is one of the reasons gamers were so excited for the Wii launch title Red Steel. With its mix of first-person shooting and hand-to-hand sword combat, the game had some promising elements, but faltered in terms of game controls, harebrained AI, and sloppy graphics. Developer Ubisoft Paris is ready to give our inner children another chance to swing some imaginary swords with a sequel that hopes to improve upon the sketchy first title.

Set in a remote metropolis smack dab in the middle of a mythical American desert, players assume the role of a character called the Swordsman. Ubisoft isn't revealing much about the story just yet, but it looks like we won't be dealing with an awkward girlfriend kidnapping this time around. Red Steel 2 is more epic: As the Swordsman, you're the only person standing between a maniacal madman and his quest to take over the world.

To keep in line with this more melodramatic narrative, the visual style slightly mimics graphic novel design. The first Red Steel suffered from trying to be too realistic, but the sequel explores an imaginary world where Asian culture collides with an American Western motif, and high tech skyscrapers rise up in the middle of expansive shines and ranches. The new art style is definitely a step in the right direction, and helps bypass some of the Wii's graphical limitations.

Unlike the first title, players can switch between their sword and guns at any time. The Wii recognizes when a player is pointing the remote at the screen, so when it's pointed at an enemy, the Swordsman draws his guns. Likewise, if a player holds the Wii remote like the hilt of a blade, he automatically unsheathes his blades. This new combat mechanic also means that players can attack enemies who are off-screen by simply slashing the remote in their direction. With all these new additions, it looks like Ubisoft Paris is working to fix the problems that dragged down the first Red Steel. We're eager to get our hands on the game to see how well it all works. ■ ■ ■



Swing With Rebels

Red Steel 2 is Wii MotionPlus exclusive, meaning you have to own Nintendo's motion attachment to play the game. However, that means Ubisoft is able to utilize the unit's extra motion fidelity to its full potential. Red Steel 2 replicates controls movements almost identically. The strength of a player's swing is dictated onscreen, so in order to cut through sturdy objects, players will have to put some extra momentum behind their strikes.

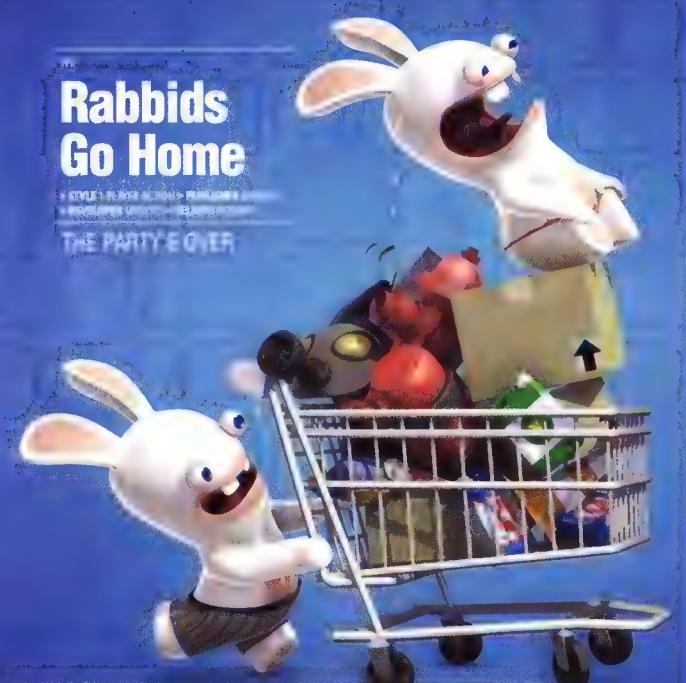


The swordplay will no longer be confined to planned moments



Rabbids Go Home

COLLECTIBLES
MINIGAMES
LEVELS
THE PARTY'S OVER



Over the course of three games, players have beaten, electrocuted, and performed experimental surgery on the deranged yet paradoxically cute rabbids. But all good things must come to an end, and the rabbids have decided it's time to return home. Only they aren't all that bright: not only do they not know where they're from, but when the moon catches their eye as a suitable substitute, the best strategy they have for reaching their new home is to construct a giant tower of junk to climb.

It's on this precarious premise that the rabbids are set to star in their very own game, saying goodbye to Rayman, minigame collections, and their abuse-laden role as antagonists once and for all. In this game, players take control of the mysterious and mentally disturbed rabbids, terrorizing humans for a change. In order for their junk pile to reach the moon, the rabbids have become wide-eyed kleptomaniacs, stealing anything and everything in sight from the in-game humans – including the shirts off their backs.

We recently tried the game and are happy to report the rabbids are funnier than ever. The new gameplay mechanics – a mixture of third-person adventure, platforming, and racing – perform admirably at this point. The missions we played focused heavily on item collecting. Everything the rabbids could get their fury little hands on went straight into their shopping cart, before being flushed down the toilet and transported to their secret stash at the end of the level. We were pleasantly surprised to see the items we were accumulating appeared in the continually growing heap that teetered perilously high above our cart, adding to the pandemonium.

Showcasing the variety in the title, another level centered on the rabbids becoming distracted and inexplicably obsessed with a cow in the back of a pickup truck. Their single-minded desire to add the apprehensive bovine to their collection resulted in a chase through a town fraught with obstacles – many of which we also snatched for our junk stash.

Ubisoft is promising to keep the premise fresh by evolving the game's open world structure as the humans revolt and launch offensive attacks on the rabbids, which range from snarling pooches to anti-rabbit robots and booby traps. The title also supports various customization options for your rabbid via the hilarious "In Ze Remote" mode, which simulates an actual rabbid living inside your controller that responds to – and gets injured by – every your button-press and gesture. Okay, so maybe the rabbid-bashing isn't completely over, but *Rabbids Go Home* looks to prove that everyone's favorite critters can offer a much deeper gameplay experience than simple minigames ■ ■ ■

NDI Taylor

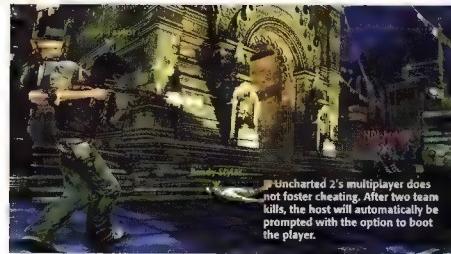


PLAYSTATION 3

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

> STYLÉ TO 3.3M ACTION & ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER NAUTY DOG > RELEASE FALL 2009

THREE'S COMPANY



Uncharted 2's multiplayer does not foster cheating. After two team kills, the host will automatically be prompted with the option to boot the player.



■ Among Thieves does not feature split-screen play. Meaning if you reside with your co-op buddy you'll have to pick up a second PS3. Or a new friend



■ GAME INFORMER

We had the pleasure of giving you a first look at Uncharted 2 in our January cover story, but details on the title have been scarce since then. We know that Among Thieves will give us a chance to explore the shadier side of Nathan Drake, partly due to his new affiliation with Chloe, an international art thief with an aversion to legitimate agencies.

Naughty Dog recently broke the silence by unveiling co-op and multiplayer modes in Drake's upcoming adventure. But don't fret — Among Thieves' co-op isn't exactly what you might expect. Naughty Dog still sees Uncharted 2 and foremost as a single-player experience. Instead, co-op unfolds through a string of single-player set pieces modified for cooperative play for up to three players. Traversing elements are minimized, action has been amped up, and the maps are now populated with obstacles that require teamwork to pass.

Narrative takes a backseat to objective-based missions with the allure of treasure pulling you forward. But narrative doesn't have much of a place in Naughty Dog's version of co-op anyway, as you can play with any combination of characters. Players can select from Drake, Chloe, and a new character named Tenzin. Elena and Sully also return for co-op, although their role in the greater game is still shrouded. New play tactics are also introduced, allowing you to revive

teammates and aid them in combat. Death requires a 20-second respawn, with the game ending if all members perish in quick succession. Co-op playlists allow you to string together sets of your choosing, and extra incentive is added as the difficulty increases each time you best a particular level.

Multiplayer details are elusive at the moment. We can confirm that Among Thieves will boast team deathmatch (3 vs. 3 minimum, 5 vs. 5 maximum) pitting heroes against villains. Naughty Dog also revealed Plunder mode, which plays a bit like capture the flag, with a piece of treasure up for grabs. While the basic multiplayer mechanics work like other shooters, the level design and light traversing elements lend themselves to vertical gameplay. Multiplayer moves fast, and due to the expansiveness of each level and the arsenal of abilities gifted to you and your foes, it's not always easy to keep tabs on opponents.

To encourage replayability, Naughty Dog integrated a slew of co-op and multiplayer medals and special unlockable content in Among Thieves. Both multiplayer and co-op run on an economy of points, which promote a deep understanding of weapon perks and kill values.

While we're still most excited to get our hands on the single-player meat of Uncharted 2, co-op and multiplayer look to be a great addition to the franchise. ■ ■ ■



■ Coop icons indicate locations and alert you to your teammates. Don't worry: characters get vocal if they are in need of aid!

■ GAME INFORMER

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Mafia II

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER 2K GAMES
 > DEVELOPER 2K CZECHEK > RELEASE FALL

RALLY 'ROUND THE FAMILY

Mafia may not have made a Grand Theft Auto-like splash in pop culture, but the impressive sandbox title quietly sold 2 million units. If our first look at the sequel is any barometer, Mafia II should easily surpass those sales.

With its predecessor's narrative wrapped tightly around a surprise ending, Mafia II opens a new chapter in organized crime. The game follows the story of Vito Scaletta, a World War II vet who returns to fictional metropolis Empire City after the war. Not content to return to the impoverished existence he knew before the war, Vito and his best friend Joe Barbaro set becoming wise guys as their only path to a better life. While Joe joins the seedy underworld in pursuit of fast cars and fast women, Vito's motivation is to give his mother and sister a life his father couldn't provide. Like *The Sopranos*, 2K says Mafia II leverages the tension of living with two families to dramatic effect.

With the move from prohibition era America to the late '40s, Mafia II rids itself of two commonly cited problems with its predecessor — slow cars and meddlesome police. The 40 cars in the game drive much faster, and the sequel tunes down the touchy law enforcement that would try to pull you over for any niggling infraction like speeding. To give players breathing room, developer 2K Czech has employed a "fat cop" system, where the squad car gives chase if you run a red light, but quickly tires of pursuing you for minor infractions. If gunplay becomes involved, the police respond by putting a bulletin out including your car make/model and your visual description. The only way to lose the heat is to ditch the car and change your clothes, or put the fuzz on your payroll.

Mafia made its mark with well-crafted, varied missions, and Mafia II promises more of the same. The first mission we witness follows Vito and Joe as they infiltrate a high-rise hotel to whack the head of the Clemente family. After instructing their getaway driver to stay put in the underground

garage, the two steal janitor suits, get in costume, and hop in the elevator. They arrive at the penthouse level where the Clemente meeting is taking place and must navigate a room filled with wise guys socializing and drinking. Vito works his way past the Mafiosi and places the bomb under the boardroom table. The duo then heads to the roof to trigger the explosion. After taking out a guard stationed atop the hotel, they slowly descend the exterior of the building using a window washer pulley. The bomb explodes, but the timing is botched — Clemente was in the restroom and survives the blast. As his guards usher him through the penthouse to safety, Vito and Joe must enter through the window and give chase.

During this sequence the game shows off its impressive new third-person shooting mechanics, complete with a cover system. As Vito methodically takes out soldiers returning fire, the environment gets ripped to shreds by bullets — cover disintegrates, bottles explode, and glass panes shatter amidst the frantic firefights. The chase eventually works its way to the streets of Empire City, where Vito must catch up to Clemente's car so Joe can take him out.

If this first mission indicates the level of quality and polish found in the rest of Mafia II, 2K could have another first-class title in its stable along with BioShock. With its signature mission structures, a deep open world filled with side-quests, and four unique endings based on your choices throughout the game, Mafia II could become the organized crime experience *The Godfather* failed to realize. ■ ■ ■



The impressive new game engine features no loading during transitions between interiors and exteriors



Mafia II features "cinematic radio" in cars that changes the music to fit the mood of the events unfolding





Alien vs. Predator

YEAR ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER REBELLION > RELEASE 2010

UNITED TIME TO BLEED

"Okay guys, the coast is clear..."

For sci-fi movie fans, Alien vs. Predator is a series of uninspired and poorly executed flops, a mair on two great movie franchises. But for sci-fi video game fans, Alien vs. Predator brings to mind fond memories of entertaining hits dating all the way back to the Atari Jaguar.

The franchise is now poised to come full circle with Rebellion, the creators of the original Atari Jaguar version and the 1999 PC sequel, taking the helm of the latest installment. After watching other developers take the series to new highs (Aliens vs. Predator 2), and new lows (Aliens vs. Predator: Extinction), Rebellion jumped at the chance to trade in its recent string of mediocre PSP

ports to return to the days of glory past.

Like previous installments of the series, the new Aliens vs. Predator offers three distinct yet interconnected campaigns in single-player mode, allowing gamers to experience the interspecies war from all sides. With each of those species possessing wildly different weapon sets, special abilities, and play mechanics, the game is a potential treasure trove of gameplay.

The keyword there, however, is "potential." We recently saw the Predator in action, and the game has a long way to go. Despite the lousy placeholder animations and stupid AI common in early builds, some clever game mechanics piqued our interest. The

Predator navigates his surroundings with ease via a powerful jumping ability similar to Wolverine's awesome leap attack in X-Men: Origins. Additionally, the sound and visuals for its human-detecting visor are nearly indistinguishable from the movie and highly amusing — as are the tri-laser aiming system and shoulder cannon used to blast former Governor Jesse Ventura's chest inside out. But the coolest thing we saw was what Rebellion dubs a "Trophy Kill." After lifting a defenseless Space Marine off of the ground and staring at him for a moment, the Predator brutally tears off the head of his captured prey. Dropping the headless body to the ground, the Predator then gazes

lovingly at his former opponent's frozen expression while softly caressing the dangling segment of spine still attached!

We'll have to wait to see if the in-game action lives up to these glorious screenshots. We also look forward to learning what the other two species bring to the table — not to mention what happens when all three competitors meet on the battlefield. Will Aliens vs. Predator be an ingenious balance of character-based strategy and fast-paced, brutal action — or a muddled mess like the movies? With an ambiguous release date of 2010, we all have a long time until we find out. ■ ■ ■



Predators are notoriously lazy, making the aliens do all the killing.

We can only hope the game looks this sweet when it's done.



PLAYSTATION 3 XBOX 360

Tekken 6

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING > PUBLISHER NAMCO
> DEVELOPER NAMCO > RELEASE FALL

AGING GRACEFULLY

Thanks to the recent success of Street Fighter IV, fans have rediscovered how addicting and rewarding fighting games are in their purest form. This renewed interest in turn creates higher expectations for the genre's linchpins. But Namco isn't worried about letting down gamers with Tekken 6, as the game incorporates all of the time-tested and fan-approved tweaks of the vastly expanded Bloodline Rebellion arcade update. After getting hands-on time with the PS3 version at a recent press event, we can safely say that the developers have stopped trying to revolutionize their fighter's formula in favor of refining what's already there to near gameplay per-

fection. Tekken 6 is the smoothest 3D fighter we've played yet.

Tekken veterans should recognize a few additions to the series — most notably the game's five new contestants, which raise the number of playable characters to more than 40. This is the largest roster available in any of the major 3D fighters. We tried out two of these new characters: Zafina, a cold Middle Eastern woman trained in "Ancient Assassination" who possesses spiritual powers, and Bob, a morbidly obese American apparently based entirely on offensive stereotypes. While Zafina's quick, fluid fighting style makes her well suited for novices, Bob's powerful blows feel stilted,

requiring a lot more practice to master.

Myriad gameplay adjustments address the balance issues from the original arcade release of Tekken 6, with character animations being fine-tuned down to individual frames. Namco is also introducing new mechanics, such as the Bound System, which offers the opportunity for longer air juggles, and the new Rage System, which gives enemies on death's door one last chance for redemption by boosting their attack power. These changes, in addition to the new multi-tiered, destructible environments, keep the otherwise subtle finessing of Tekken from feeling more like outright stagnation.

As you can tell from the screenshots, the

series has aged well over the past 14 years. Thanks to graphical enhancements such as independent motion blur on characters, newly developed shaders, and a much touted "sun shaft" effect, Tekken looks better than ever and reportedly runs at a solid 60 frames per second. Although no specifics have been made available yet, both the PS3 and Xbox 360 versions offer some form of online play, plenty of character customization, and new console exclusive content, making it the most definitive edition of Tekken 6 to date — and one hell of a contender to all other fighters on the market. ■ ■ ■



■ Heihachi and Kazuya Mishima demonstrate Tekken 6's new "sun shaft" effect



■ Survival Rule #1: Don't tease the panda



■ I told you not to come to the market in your pajamas anymore, Grandpa!



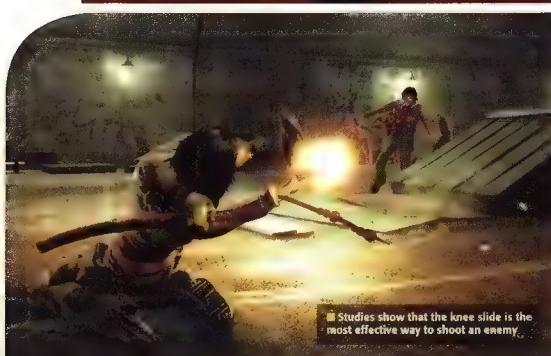
■ Zafina explains to Bob that he misunderstood the meaning of size matters.



■ Kicked in the back of the head by a girl with puffy balls tied to her shoes... for shame



■ Wet features plenty of guns, swords, and blood.



■ Studies show that the knee slide is the most effective way to shoot an enemy.



■ Obviously, Rubi doesn't understand how aerodynamics affect fuel consumption.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Wet

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER BETHESDA SOFTWORKS
> DEVELOPER A2M > RELEASE 2009

TWO GUNS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

While many developers claim Quentin Tarantino's films as an inspiration for their games, few manage to employ his grindhouse-inspired style in a meaningful way. After seeing a quick demo of A2M's upcoming action game Wet, it looks like that's about to change. Wet's cutscenes encapsulate the gritty and decadent genre's feel thanks to smart music selection, artsy direction, and enough graphical flourishes to convince gamers the story is unfolding on 20-year-old celluloid. The only thing that appears to be missing from Wet's emulation of a Tarantino movie is an over-the-top cameo from the eccentric director himself.

The homage to grindhouse films doesn't end when the player takes control; the visual style and excitement of movies like *Kill Bill* and *Desperado* are readily apparent during the action, which features pleasantly spastic firefights and agile protagonist Rubi pulling off more acrobatics than an Olympic gymnast. In the first level alone, we see her sliding through shootouts on her knees, spinning around poles, and descending ladders while hanging upside-down from her legs — and she never stops shooting the entire time.

Rubi's slick moves add more to Wet's gameplay than just visual flair; they also slow down time, allowing players to string

together fatal attacks via the game's combo system. The bigger the combos Rubi pulls off, the more upgrade points she gets, allowing the player to not only buy new weapons (the developers are big on dual-wielding, and even heavy artillery like shotguns and explosive crossbows will be useable in pairs), but to upgrade Rubi's athletic abilities as well.

A2M also promises to add variety to the gameplay, including some rail-shooting sequences and a rage mode, which sends Rubi into a red-tinted killing frenzy that's strangely evocative of those old iPod commercials — only much more violent. One thing gamers won't be seeing, however, is any tacked-on stealth sequences; Wet is an action game from beginning to end, and the developers plan to keep it that way.

With a script penned by a veteran writer of TV show *24* and voice acting from the likes of Eliza Dushku and Malcolm McDowell, it appears A2M intends to set a new standard for future action games. It's too early to tell whether Rubi can deliver on those intentions or if she'll fall flat on her face like so many forgettable characters of the genre. All we can say so far is A2M is definitely copying the right body of work. ■ ■ ■



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Alpha Protocol

> STYLE | PLAYER ACTION/RPG > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER OBSDIAN ENTERTAINMENT > RELEASE OCTOBER

SPIES LIKE HIM

Have you ever considered the potential downsides of world peace? Sure, war and suffering would be things of the past. But on the other hand, super spies like Michael Thorton would be out of a job. Luckily for him, the world of Alpha Protocol is full of strife and international intrigue, and we recently saw even more of the features and conflicts that gamers will encounter as they steer Thorton into harm's way.

As you unravel the conspiracy, one of your missions tasks Thorton to a snowy compound in Moscow crawling with enemies – and potential allies. After you clear out the first wave of thugs, Thorton meets a machine gun-toting seductress named Sie in command of her own small militia. In the ensuing conversation, your responses impact your standing with Sie and her troops; if you adopt an aggressive and no-nonsense tone, she gains respect for you and will help you out. Conversely, if you act like a glib wiseguy, she loses

patience and her troops may attack you. Either way, Thorton runs into Sie again later in the level, and if you insist on making her mad, you can participate in an optional boss fight against her.

Your choices in Alpha Protocol extend beyond different conversation options. As Thorton works his way through the base in Moscow, multiple gameplay paths present themselves, and players decide which one best suits their skills. One route favors run-and-gun tactics, ideal for spies skilled with machine guns. Another uses stealth tactics to avoid detection, and the third involves hacking through security to access sealed areas. Depending on how you have allocated your skill points, you have unique abilities that augment your chosen style. For instance, sneaky characters have the ability to run silently, while gun specialists have improved criticals or the ability to chain multiple shots together. The potential variation in player builds means that the game has a different

feel based on your choices.

When Thorton isn't surrounded by enemies or dodging gunfire, he spends his time in luxurious safehouses in exotic locations like Taipei, Rome, and Saudi Arabia. The safehouses essentially function as your hub for an area, allowing you to buy information and weapons, select missions, and customize your appearance. While the basic character model is always the same, players help Thorton build a disguise by equipping armor, hats, glasses, and facial hair that range from awesome to ridiculous. No one wants to hassle a dude with a lumberjack beard!

Alpha Protocol was initially slated to come out earlier this year, but with a new October release date, Obsidian has more time to tune the mechanics and ensure that this mixture of espionage and role-playing lives up to its potential. The game is already looking pretty good, so we can't wait to see the results of a few extra months of polish. ■■■





PC

Star Wars: The Old Republic

> **STYLE** MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAME > **PUBLISHER** LUCASARTS
 > **DEVELOPER** BIOWARE > **RELEASE TBA**

FULLY VOICED!

"In modern games, players no longer want to read blocks of text," says James Ohlen, BioWare creative director and lead designer on *The Old Republic*. "They want to be immersed in game worlds the same way they are immersed in movies, TV, etc." To that end, this ambitious MMO features full voice acting for every character in the game. Though Ohlen admits that the budget required is "pretty ridiculous," the companies involved eventually agreed that doing a BioWare Star Wars MMO right is worth the cost.

Voice dialogue allows the writers more freedom in portraying the many characters who populate *The Old Republic*. "A whisper in the ear, a muttered denial, a subtle hint that not all is what it appears. These are the moments that make us believe in a character's reality and are extremely hard to do without great acting," explains principal lead writer Daniel Erickson. "It may seem counter-intuitive at first glance, but full voice also allows us to talk far less while getting far more story." Aside from the obvious advantages in characterization, voice changes the way players interact with the game. As an example, Erickson points to a reduced need for immersion-breaking interface elements due to the increased chatter during battle.

Other details on *The Old Republic* continue to trickle out as we close in on the game's release. BioWare has unveiled three new classes that appear to be exactly what fans expect: the mind-minded trooper,

roguish smuggler, and mercenary bounty hunter. In gameplay terms, the trooper is a heavily armed and armored ranged combatant who comes strapped with big rifles and plenty of grenades. The smuggler also prefers to fight from a distance, but is a more agile, quick-witted fighter who utilizes stealth and misdirection to prevail. Bounty hunters are happy to engage any mark, up to and including Jedi. They use the best firepower on the black market, along with an impressive array of tricks and gadgets, to complete their contracts.

BioWare also revealed two new planets, both of which are familiar to any Star Wars nerd worth his talking Millennium Falcon toy. Hutta (otherwise known as Nal Hutta) is home to many formidable Hutt crime cartels. Though neutral in the context of the Republic-Sith conflict, Hutta is a polluted industrial wasteland full of sentient and feral predators. Ord Mantell, on the other hand, is a critical Republic strategic asset. However, it's also in the process of being torn apart by a civil war between the Republic-loyal corrupt bureaucracy and a faction of separatists who have had enough of the underworld-controlled government.

Between BioWare and LucasArts, *The Old Republic* lacks no creative talent or financial backing. No release date has been announced yet, though — the pieces are all in place, but fans have a bit of waiting to endure before the final product is ready. ■■■



The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest

>STYLE | 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE > DEVELOPER HEADSTRONG GAMES > RELEASE FALL

A NEW RINGBEARER

Even had its last shot at Lord of the Rings with its recent Conquest title. The rights to the franchise have now come to Warner Bros., so we expect a new approach to the franchise moving forward. The first announced adventure under the new publishing banner is the Wii-exclusive Aragorn's Quest. We chatted with development director Steve Pritchard to learn what we should expect from the new title.

"The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest allows players to relive the events of the book and movies, playing as Aragorn battling to save Middle-earth from the minions of Sauron," Pritchard says. "It's a true third-person action adventure." The game opens several years after the end of the story told in the books and movies, with Samwise Gamgee now the mayor of the Shire. He sits down to tell the story of Aragorn to the adoring local children, and the action starts from there. "Everything that is crucial to the telling of that tale is in the game, and the player first becomes Strider in the town of Bree and continues his story right through to those final epic moments at the Gates of Mordor," Pritchard explains.

A big focus of the action controls is on-one-to-one motions that translate to onscreen moves. Stab the Wii remote forward, and Aragorn lunges with his sword. Swing a wide arc and Aragorn showers sweeping blows

on Mordor's brood. The nunchuk is set up to offer a similar experience for the off-hand equipment, whatever that might be. If it's a shield, snapping the nunchuk forward might send Aragorn bashing ahead into an orc to knock it off balance. On the ruined summit of Weathertop, wave the nunchuk furiously to fight off the Ring Wraiths with a flaming brand. Motion controls even govern Aragorn's archery, allowing him to shoot burning arrows and other special shots to drop his foes.

As a game targeted to a wide age group, including families, it's great to hear that co-op is in the mix. "Aragorn and Gandalf get to fight side by side," Pritchard tells us. "Gandalf's mastery of magic lets the player toss fireballs, lightning, and other destructive spells at his enemies, while he can also protect and heal Aragorn and the Fellowship when the action gets hot."

Our early look at the game sadly didn't include hands-on time to test out the ambitious motion control set-up, but the combat premise sounds promising. Plus, Headstrong Games did some impressive work on the Wii with *The House of the Dead: Overkill*. If the hobbit children's fairytale angle isn't too obtrusive, Aragorn's Quest has the potential to be a fun, if simplified take on Tolkien's sprawling fiction. ■■■





UNLIMITED ENABLED

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PSP

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
 > DEVELOPER LUXOFUX (PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360), KROME STUDIOS (WII) > RELEASE SUMMER 2009

EXPANDING OPTIONS

The first Transformers movie game didn't win any game of the year awards, but it was a solid and exciting opportunity to indulge in some cathartic robot-destroying fantasy. Luxofux, the developer behind the recent Kung Fu Panda game, has been handed the reins for the sequel. So far, the studio's approach seems to be centered around improvement and expansion of the existing formula, rather than a total redesign of the first game.

You once again play through two independent campaigns, defending the planet as the peace-loving Autobots or destroying earth as the evil Decepticons. One big change allows for players to select between numerous missions and characters from a central hub – the

game no longer moves along a linear path.

Once you're in a mission, the explosions and laser blasts start flying instantly. The new transformation mechanic feels far more natural than last time, allowing momentum to carry the character forward even as they transform and move through the open levels. Fans will be happy to see a host of the old Generation 1 sub-factions make appearances as enemies – stunticons, protectobots, and omnibots will be familiar names to old time collectors. For the rest of the Transformers enthusiasts out there, Luxofux has done a great job of keeping the focus on fast, non-stop action. Every character has a special rechargeable power, such as Ironhide's ability to deploy a turret to aid in his fights.

Completing missions in a certain time earns medals, which help provide upgrades to your team. Thankfully, every upgrade you apply works for the entire faction, not just the individual character who built up the points.

Four-on-four multiplayer battles highlight the online options, where friends can blast each other to bits as any one of the playable characters in the game. We're also hearing about some pretty sweet unlockable content that Luxofux has built in, including everything from original G1 TV episodes to unlockable G1 color versions of Ironhide and Starscream. We've yet to play enough of the game to gauge its final quality, but it's clear that its sights are set squarely on Transformers enthusiasts. ■■■



SAME SETTING, DIFFERENT GAME

The Wii and PS2 are receiving their own dedicated versions of Revenge of the Fallen, based around the same events and places from the movie, but utilizing an entirely different gameplay mechanic. This arcade-style game has more self-contained levels, with battles that encourage quick switching between robot mode and driving or flight modes. On Wii, the remote allows you to point and shoot at onscreen enemies, while gestures trigger melee attacks. A cool drop-in co-op feature allows a second player to control a remote weapon and add to the mechanized destruction.



THE LINEUP

Luxofux knows that everybody has their favorite transformer, so they've included as many playable robots as they could fit in. Check out the full list:

AUTOBOTS:
 Optimus Prime
 Ironhide
 Breakaway
 Rumblebee
 Ratchet
 Aerialbot (multiplayer only)
 Protectobot (multiplayer only)

DECEPTICONS:
 Starscream
 Sideways
 Grindor
 Long Haul
 Megatron
 Seeker (multiplayer only)





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

NHL 10

> STYLE | TO 7-PLAYER SPORTS (PS3), 1 TO 4-PLAYER (XBOX 360) (12 PLAYER ONLINE)
 > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS > DEVELOPER EA CANADA > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 8

THE NEW OLD-TIME HOCKEY

They've been grinding you down all period. You can't get it out of your zone, and when you do, your playmakers have no room to move. If things continue like this you'll never climb out of the two-goal hole. It's time to fight fire with fire. Your coach changes his line strategy and starts deploying your fourth line: the plumbers, the muckers, the grinders, the tough guys – whatever you want to call them. These guys don't score much, but they skate hard, finish their checks, and give your team a physical presence that keeps you from being pushed around. It's just what you need to claw your way back into this game, and it's the kind of feature that the NHL franchise needs to bring the intensity of the sport to life.

NHL 09 is arguably the best hockey game ever made, but it was missing the grit to run an effective forecheck, which meant rival defenders weren't pressured enough by your forwards when the puck was in their zone. This year's game makes the forecheck better in two ways: physically and mentally. The new pinning mechanic allows you to trap players against the boards as teammates automatically come over to help dig the puck out. In the context of the forecheck, this makes it easier to put pressure on your opponent's defensemen as they try and break the puck out from their zone.

The more you establish a physical presence, whether via the forecheck, checks into the boards, or open-ice hits, the more

it mentally wears the other players down. Do this enough and they'll start bobbling pucks in anticipation of a hit and their stats will dip. The way for a team to stop playing scared is to send out the fourth line to be intimidated. Or you could intentionally start a fight to try and pump up your fans and your teammates and change the momentum of the game.

NHL's new first-person fighting isn't as complex as Fight Night, but it uses analog punches and clutching to settle scores. The game even has tough guys take a fight if you try and draw superstar Patrick Kane, for instance, into dropping his gloves. If you don't assign a tough guy on the same line to protect your skill players, they'll have to fend for themselves and risk insult and injury.

NHL 10 may show a more physical side, but it is not without artful additions as well. Precision passing lets you control the direction and speed of your passes (including banking the puck off the boards or dishing it into open ice), players can one-time loose pucks in front of the net for garbage goals, and aware skaters now automatically try and grab pucks out of mid-air and drop them to their stick.

As EA Sports tries to make its NHL game a complete player, these additions are just the beginning. This title also boasts new twists to its Be-A-Pro, Franchise, and Online modes that we can't talk about yet. Not unless we want to dance with their tough guy. ■■■



■ Fans bang on the glass as players try to get at the puck in the new play along the boards



■ Now you can stick your smelly glove in the face of an opponent and give him a face wash... or the whistle to upgrade



■ Which Canuck is throwing punches? It can't be Alex Burrows, because this guy's not trying to grab hair like a sissy



NINTENDO DS

Nostalgia

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION
 > PUBLISHER IGNITION ENTERTAINMENT
 > DEVELOPER MATRIX SOFTWARE
 > RELEASE SEPTEMBER 23

TIMELESS FLIGHT

Many anonymous Japanese RPGs are filled with spiky-haired heroes whose amnesia is the least of the game's problems. *Nostalgia* aims to offer a more memorable experience filled with an inviting art style, airships, and locations to explore from London to Cairo. *Nostalgia*'s developer, Matrix Software, helped make the DS versions of both *Final Fantasy III* and *IV*. The game also features people who've worked on *Fatal Frame*, *Grandia*, *Sakura Taisen*, and *Gungnir*. The project draws on this breadth of development experience to deliver an RPG that has a little bit of everything.

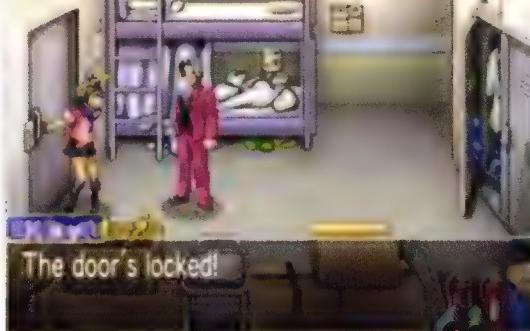
Nostalgia, which has already released in Japan, takes place in an alternate-history version of the 19th century, where battling airships and your usual coterie of RPG magical trappings are the norm. You play Eddie, the son of legendary adventurer Gilbert. When dad goes missing after saving a girl from being sacrificed in a mysterious ceremony involving a powerful shard, you inherit his battleship and take off in search of him. Traversing the world map, Eddie touches down around the globe in locales such as New York, London, Egypt, Africa, and Russia. He can also stop at various locations between these major cities to explore and perform side quests.

Both airship and regular interpersonal combat are similar turn-based affairs, but the former features some of its own twists. While in the air you can rotate between front, left, and right, and enemies attack from all sides. Players still take their individual turns in attacking (there is a queue on the bottom screen), and each person in your four-person party has his or her own attacks via the ship. Some excel at striking in a certain direction, such as to the left or right. Your vessel is customizable, including its main gun, cannons, shields, and the intimidating sword blade protruding from the bow.

You can also outfit your party with a standard array of items and offensive and defensive equipment, and the inventory features slots for power augmentation, such as crystals. *Nostalgia*'s upgrade system features skill paths that let you direct how your characters power up their MP-using abilities. In our short time with the game, it didn't take long to push Eddie's damage-inducing Overdrive skill up to level five, and with a fair number of directions in which to grow the characters, this should be an interesting aspect of the game.

Beyond its captivating looks, *Nostalgia* appears well versed in the standards of the RPG genre. Thankfully, it also delivers some variety with its air combat and customization options, which pique interest above and beyond its familiar foundation. Like any RPG, we imagine the game's full story won't be told until we're many hours on our journey. ■■■





NINTENDO DS

Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE WINTER



SERIES TURNABOUT

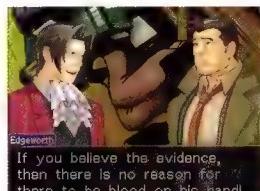
While Phoenix Wright and, more recently, Apollo Justice have served as the faces of the Ace Attorney franchise, the name Miles Edgeworth is instantly recognizable to fans of the series. As Wright's longtime frenemy, this prosecutor used to do whatever it took to win a case. He has grown a conscience over time, but hasn't lost the tenacity to solve cases at any cost.

As is hinted in the title, Edgeworth brings some much-needed gameplay alterations to the franchise. Investigations take place completely outside of the courtroom and focus primarily on scouring crime scenes with the help of bumbling detective Dick Gumshoe and new teenage girl sidekick Kay Faraday. The most drastic change, however, is the new third-person view. Not only does this allow players to more thoroughly explore environments; it also opens the door to a much wider variety of

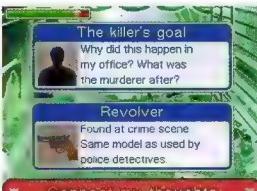
sprite-based animations. You now see the action rather than just having it described to you in text.

The basic gameplay flow starts with a traditional murder sequence. Edgeworth arrives at the crime scene and gathers evidence, then enters Logic Mode to find connections and determine contradictions. A successful logic session can push the case forward, but a screw up will cost you some of your green "truth" bar and take you one step closer to game over.

Even though Edgeworth is out of the courtroom this time around, it doesn't mean he won't be getting in people's faces. Similar to the cross examinations from the earlier games, he must confront suspects with his findings in order to expose contradictions and ultimately have them dragged away in handcuffs for their day in court. ■■■



If you believe the evidence, then there is no reason for there to be blood on his hand!



XBOX 360

Magna Carta 2

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ROLE-PLAYING GAME > PUBLISHER NAMCO BANDAI > DEVELOPER SOFTMAX > RELEASE FALL

BETTER THAN ANCIENT LEGAL DOCUMENTS

The original *Magna Carta* may have unnerved some with its menagerie of sexy feminine dudes, but at least the original PS2 title provided gamers with a rich combat system that took time to master. Now the 2005 RPG is getting a sequel on the Xbox 360 thanks to the franchise's new publisher Namco Bandai.

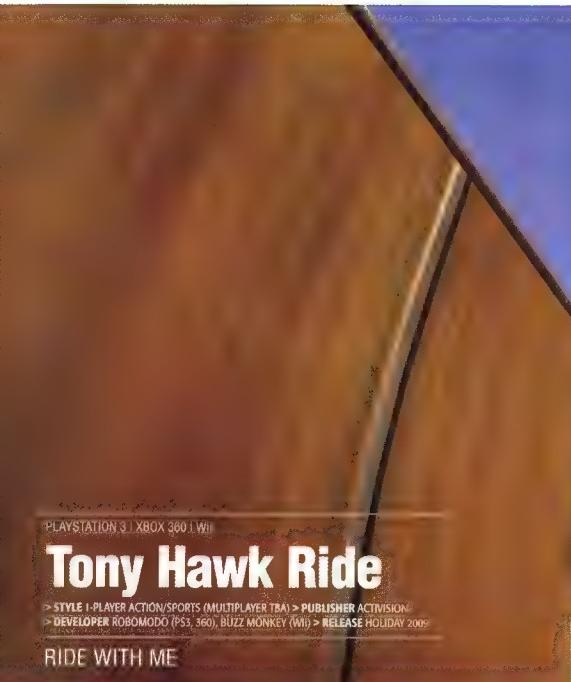
Those who never played the first title needn't worry; *Magna Carta 2* has a new storyline. The game opens within a world called Lanzheim Continent, a country torn in half by a bloody civil war. Players take control of a young boy by the name of Judo, and work to end the cycle of bloodshed.

As generic as the story sounds, fans of the first title's combat system will be glad to know that the sequel features an intriguing mix of real-time action and strategic turn-based combat. Special moves require skill-

ful timing to deal out maximum damage, giving *Magna Carta 2*'s combat a rhythmic feel. Each weapon bestows on its wielder different fighting styles, so characters that aren't performing up to your expectations need only change their equipment to take on a different role in combat. Players eager to mix it up in battle will need to upgrade their armaments or make new weapons by using Kamonds dropped from monsters.

The game world also promises to be more interactive, as players can use objects within their surroundings during battle, and creatures will react dynamically to different landscapes. Encounters with enemies and exploration both take place in the same environment, so hopefully this means load times will be kept shorter this time around. RPG fans should keep their eyes peeled for more information on this title as we approach its fall release. ■■■





PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII

Tony Hawk Ride

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/SPORTS (MULTIPLAYER TBA) > PUBLISHER ACTIVISION
> DEVELOPER ROBOMODO (PS3, 360), BUZZ MONKEY (WII) > RELEASE HOLIDAY 2009

RIDE WITH ME

Over the past 10 years, the Tony Hawk series created the modern skateboarding video game, continually refined and expanded the genre's formula in the face of countless mundane copycats, and became the victim of a cringe-inducing faceplant as EA's Skate franchise took center stage. Activision knows it is going to take more than a few new skate parks and some minor gameplay tweaks to win back fans entranced by Skate's realistic and addictive take on the sport.

For the development team at Robomodo, this is an opportunity to realize Tony Hawk's original dream for a skating game, and the result is more than just a 180 for the series. Not even Tony Hawk himself could pull off enough mid-air spins to accurately reflect the huge gamble Activision is taking: introducing the newest addition to the fevered craze of plastic video game peripherals, dubbed simply, "the board."

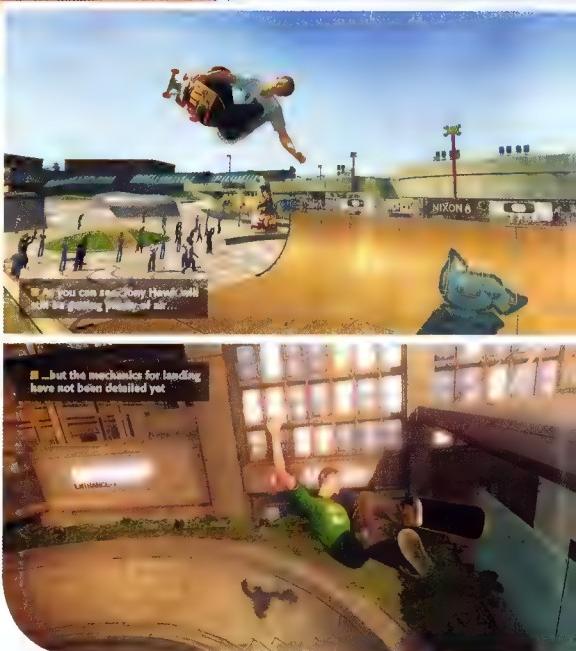
Measuring only four inches shorter than a standard deck, the new Tony Hawk board features two built-in accelerometers, as well as IR sensors on the front, back, and sides of the board to detect the player's hands and feet. According to Robomodo, the result is remarkably similar to riding a real skateboard: Players tilt left or right to navigate the in-game world, and pop the front or back of the board up to perform nollies or ollies.

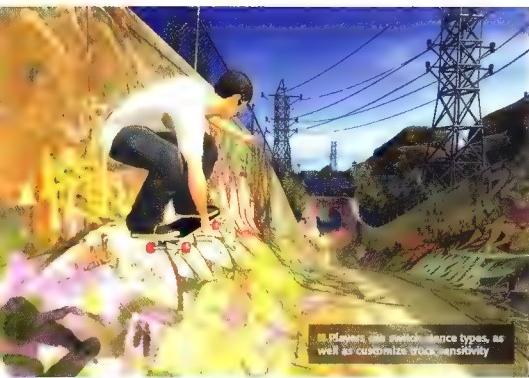
Tricks are performed by manually grabbing

and manipulating the board — what actions are then performed will depend upon whether your in-game character is on the ground or in the air, or if you're in a context-specific location (such as being at the top of a halfpipe). Players can even customize how the board responds, including the ability to tighten or loosen your virtual trucks.

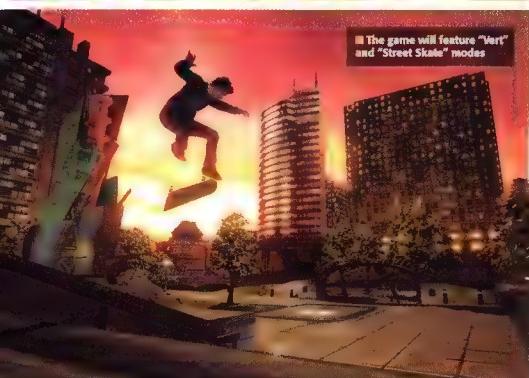
The visuals have also gotten an overhaul, albeit a much subtler one. Tired of the dark and gritty atmosphere of other skating games, Robomodo trades the realism of past Tony Hawk titles for a more animated look reminiscent of the psychedelic sci-fi movie *A Scanner Darkly*. A few minutes of seeing the game in action was enough to convince us it's not the visual style we need to be worried about; Tony Hawk Ride will live or die by how well the board handles.

Bailing on the combo-heavy formula of previous Tony Hawk games for a button-free peripheral is a daring move to say the least, and one that has us more than a little skeptical. We're looking forward to seeing how Tony Hawk Ride handles for ourselves — as well as the inevitable YouTube videos of skater-wannabes unintentionally kickflipping the new board through their televisions. The skateboarding genre just got a little more interesting. ■■■

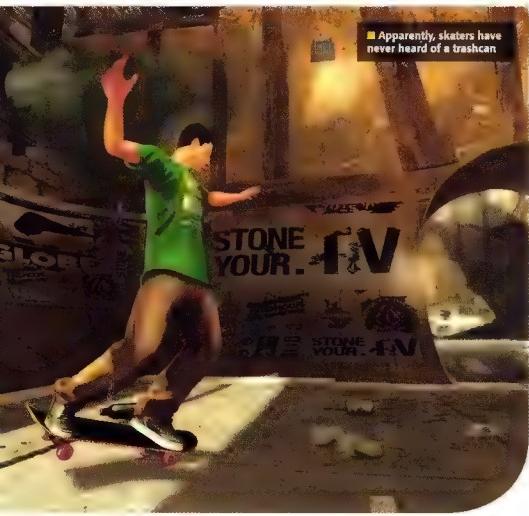




• Players can switch defense types, as well as customize truck sensitivity



The game will feature "Vert" and "Street Skate" modes



■ Apparently, skaters have never heard of a trashcan



四、社会文化语境下的“新”与“老”

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PHOTOPHILE

Mini Previews With Big Pictures



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Resonance of Fate

Respected RPG developer Tri-Ace continues its tradition of creating RPGs (Infinite Undiscovery, Valkyrie Profile, Star Ocean) with *Resonance of Fate*. The company is breaking its long-standing publishing relationship with Square Enix/Sega will be putting out this tech-styled RPG in early 2010. What looks to be the main character has a man-ponytail, leather jacket, a handgun, and a penchant for paining people in the face. Gameplay and story details are scarce but from what we've seen so far, Tri-Ace's action-style combat mechanics look to be in full effect.



PLAYSTATION 3

White Knight Chronicles

Level-5's *White Knight Chronicles* met lukewarm critical and commercial reception when it debuted in Japan in December of 2008. The title's hybrid combat system does away with random encounters by allowing players to run seemingly into battles; however, a load bar must fill between successive attacks. The player can also toggle between characters or change AI tactics as the situation warrants. Combat earns you skill points which are applied towards mastering melee or magic skills in a classless system. This allows characters to grow dynamically, avoiding pigeonholing them into offensive, defensive, or support roles. Combos are also an important part of battle, requiring the allocation of a finite number of action choices to pull off. *White Knight Chronicles* is slated to hit the States later this year.



PSP

Unbound Saga

Toxopolis is a special place; it's a satirical comic book realm where enemies are drawn into existence. Within this world are Rick Ajax and Lori Machete, two self-styled lawlers who are all too eager to fight their way out of this strange universe. In the style of the classic side-scrolling beat 'em ups of the '90s, Rick and Lori will confront a mysterious figure known only as "The Maker," and do battle with evil minions, homeless vagabonds, and angry bears. Games who pine for classic punch, punch, punch gameplay should definitely keep their eye out for this Vogstar-developed title when it becomes available for download on the PSP's Playstation Store July 16. Those who really get into the game might also want to check out the comic miniseries in parallel from Dark Horse.



Wii

Tatsunoko vs. Capcom: Ultimate All-Stars

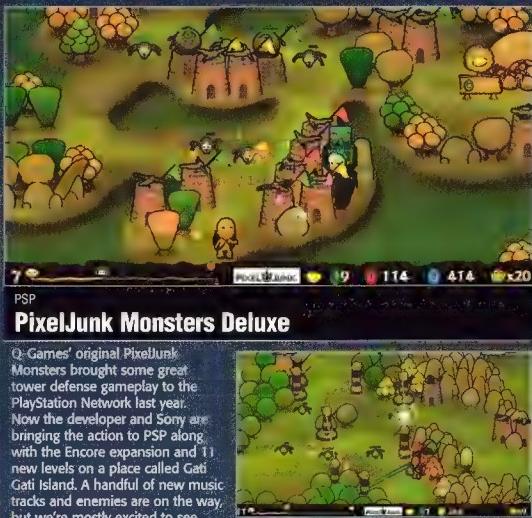
Marvel vs. Capcom fans and anime dorks alike can rejoice over Capcom's newest mash-up, which pits its biggest heroes against the likes of anime house Tatsunoko. For those who aren't familiar, Tatsunoko is a Japanese animation company that has been around since the mid '60s, and is responsible for shows like *Speed Racer*, *Battle of the Planets*, and *Robotech*. Each player commands a tag team of two fighters, including characters like Street Fighter's Chun-Li, Joe from *Viewtiful Joe*, and Ken the Eagle from *G-Force/Battle of the Planets*. Players will also be able to call in an assist character to help them out with special attacks. Capcom hasn't announced a release for this seventh entry in the Vs. franchise, but we hope to see this title out before the end of the year.



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | PC

Rogue Warrior

Finally, a game with guns! Okay, *Rogue Warrior* has a bit more going for it than a virtual arsenal of high-powered weapons. Rebellion's game is being developed with help from Dick Marcinko, a decorated soldier whose real-life exploits served as a starting point for the game's action. Marcinko (voiced by actor Mickey Rourke) slinks through North Korea and '80s-era Soviet Russia, performing brutal kill maneuvers and hurling f-bombs aplenty. Players can take control of the man beneath the ponytail sometime this fall.



PSP

PixelJunk Monsters Deluxe

Q-Games' original *PixelJunk Monsters* brought some great tower defense gameplay to the PlayStation Network last year. Now the developer and Sony are bringing the action to PSP along with the Encore expansion and 11 new levels on a place called Gati Gati Island. A handful of new music tracks and enemies are on the way, but we're mostly excited to see how the new experience and trap towers change things up. *Deluxe* also features both local and online two-player co-op and will be available this fall.



WII | NINTENDO DS

MySims Agents



The *MySims* franchise steps even further away from the traditional Sims style with *MySims Agents*, its most unique entry to date. Casting players as international bigheaded men of mystery, the game allows you to investigate the nefarious plans of MorcuCo, an evil multinational, with a variety of sophisticated gadgets. You'll be able to put your puzzle solving skills to the test while picking locks, hacking computers, and performing forensic

investigations. As a super spy, you'll be able to recruit and command a whole team of Sims agents from a customizable headquarters you can outfit with various treasures you find in your missions.

REVIEWS

We Play The Crap So You Don't Have To

MULTI



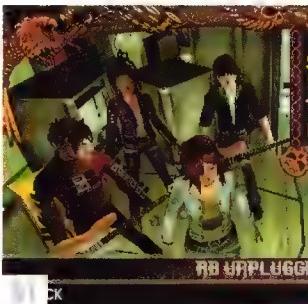
Ghostbusters



Grand Slam Tennis



Battlestations Pacific



Red Faction: Guerrilla

If you're thinking about a career in demolitions, or just enjoy watching buildings turn into rubble, Red Faction: Guerrilla is the game you've been waiting for. All mission types and multiplayer modes lead to heaps of shattered glass, twisted metal, and Earth Defense Force corpses. No game has ever delivered such a realistic depiction of destruction. Structural engineers be damned!

Our crack (or crackhead, we can never decide which) review team rates games in a number of categories to help you sort out the great from the stuff you'll hate. Most games are reviewed by two staff members, and you will find both their opinions on each review. To make things a little easier we have put together some definitions of what the numbers mean, what we look for in a game, and also a cheat sheet so the newbies can understand our advanced video game jargon. It is important to note that the Game of the Month is determined only by the main review score, not an average of the two opinions.

THE SCORING SYSTEM

10

Outstanding. A truly elite title that is nearly perfect in every way. This score is given out rarely and indicates a game that cannot be missed.

9

Superb. Just shy of gaming nirvana, this score is a high recommendation because the game reviewed is head-and-shoulders above its competition.

8

Very Good. Innovative, but perhaps not the right choice for everyone. This score indicates that there are many good things to be had, but arguably so.

7

Average. The game's features may work, but are nothing that even casual players haven't seen before. A decent game from beginning to end.

6

Limited Appeal. Although there may be fans of games receiving this score, many will be left yearning for a more rewarding game experience.

5

Possible. It may be obvious that the game has lots of potential, but its most engaging features could be undeniably flawed or not integrated into the experience.

4

Bad. While some things may work as planned, the majority of this title either malfunction to varying degrees or it is so dull that the game falls short as a whole.

3

Painful. If there is anything that's redeeming in a game of this caliber, it's buried beneath agonizing gameplay and uneven execution in its features or theme.

2

Broken. Basically unplayable. This game is so insufficient in execution that any value would be derived in extremely small quantities, if at all.

1

Play him off, keyboard cat.

Rock Band Unplugged and Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner

We couldn't pick between these two titles, because they both deliver in their respective areas of the gaming spectrum. Rock Band Unplugged lovingly revives the style of Harmonix's PS2 classics Frequency and Amplitude, and Devil Survivor is an addictive mixture of strategy and turn-based combat. Whether you prefer fast-paced rhythm games or experimental RPGs, it's a good month to keep your PSP and DS close at hand.

> Concept: What new ideas the game brings to the table and how well old ideas are presented.

> Graphics: How good a game looks, taking into account any flaws such as bad collision or pop-up.

> Sound: Does the game's music and sound effects get you involved or do they make you resolve to always play with the volume down?

> Playability: Basically, the controller to human interface. The less you think about the hunk of plastic in your hands, the better the playability.

> Entertainment: Flat out, just how fun the game is to play. The most important factor in rating a game.

> Replay Value

High - You'll still be popping this game in five years from now.

Moderately High - Good for a long while, but the thrills won't last forever.

Moderate - Good for a few months or a few times through.

Moderately Low - After finishing it, there's not much reason to give it a second go.

Low - You'll quit playing before you complete the game.

PC



Cryostasis



Flower, Sun, and Rain

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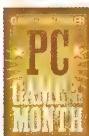
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The Sims 3

The latest entry in EA's star simulation franchise is far more than a new selection of party clothes and fancy furniture. The Sims 3 makes your virtual neighborhood even livelier, and gives players an array of new goals to keep them occupied for five minutes or five hours. Increased depth for everyday interactions makes the world more immersive, and personality traits give every Sim Citizen a life of their own. With a host of features and accommodations for all playstyles, The Sims 3 is the best entry in the series yet.



the edge

Silver All Games Award Created Equal

This is where GI breaks down multi-platform games. So whenever you see this logo, there is important multi-system information regarding that product.

For our newer readers, here is a glossary of terms and acronyms that commonly appear in the magazine. Video game veterans should move along (these aren't the droids you are looking for).

HDMI – A resolution specification used for HDTV.

1080 – stands for resolution of 1920x1080 pixels.

The 'Y' means that the video is being interlaced to provide the best resolution for gaming on an HDTV. Interlaced, 1080p generates an image at resolution of 1920x1080 in progressive format.

480p – Progressive scanning, this option ('p' = progressive), creates a picture signal with double the scan lines of a conventional interlaced picture. 480i ('i' = interlaced), to create a noticeably sharper image, sacrifices vertical resolution for picture resolution and eliminates virtually all motion artifacts in a 640x480 pixel resolution setting.

720p – A resolution specification used for HDTV. 720p stands for resolution of 1280x720 pixels. The 'p' means that the video is in progressive format.

4K – A term we use for games like Civilization and Total War. Abbreviation means "explore, expand, conquer."

action – A term we use for games like God of War and Devil May Cry.

ad hoc – A type of wireless connection that connects you with other players in your immediate vicinity.

AI – Artificial Intelligence. Usually refers to how well the computer interacts to humans opponents or works with human allies.

adventure – A term we use for games like Myst and Escape From Monkey Island.

bloom – An effect that simulates the soft, blurred glow of bright light reflecting off of surfaces.

board – A term we use for games like Scrabble and Monopoly

cel shading – A technique used to create 3D rendered objects that resemble hand-drawn animation cells.

CG – Computer Generated. Usually refers to cutscenes that don't use in-game graphics.

DLC – Downloadable content. Usually taken the form of inexpensive or free add-ons to existing games.

E3 – Electronic Entertainment Expo. A gaming convention held every year since 1995. It is one of the largest events in the gaming industry.

fan art – A game made by a console manufacturer's internal development teams exclusively for its own system.

fighting – A term we use for games like Mortal Kombat and Dead or Alive.

FPS – First-Person Shooter. Describes games like Halo, Doom, and Call of Duty. Also used to denote the phrase "first-person shooter," which means how many frames happen in one second.

frame rate – The frames of animation used to generate the impression of movement.

frontend – A game's menus and options.

HDTV – High Definition Television.

NPC – Non-Player Character. Those people and creatures you see wandering around in games that are not being controlled by actual humans.

particle effects – Things like smoke or sparks created in real-time.

platform – A term we use for games like Super Mario and Ratchet & Clank.

pop-up – When a window or screen suddenly appears, usually to point or draw distance.

PSP – Sony PlayStation 2

PS3 – Sony's PlayStation 3 console

puzzle – A term we use for games like Tetris and Picross.

racing – A term we use for games like Gran Turismo and Mario Kart.

RPG – Role-Playing Game. A term games like Final Fantasy and The Elder Scrolls.

RTS – Real-Time Strategy. A subgenre of strategy games including titles like StarCraft and Command & Conquer.

shooter – A term we use for games like Call of Duty and Gears of War.

sports – A term we use for games like Madden NFL and Top Spin.

strategy – A term we use for games like Warcraft and Fire Emblem.

tapping – Easy enough for anyone to do, except when playing Left's Tap.

third-party – Something made for a console by a company other than the console manufacturer.

	Content suitable for persons ages 3 and older
	Content suitable for persons 17 years and older
	Content suitable for persons ages 6 and older
	Content suitable for persons 10 and older
	Product is awaiting final rating
	Content suitable for persons ages 13 and older



PLAYSTATION 3 / XBOX 360

Red Faction: Guerrilla

TITLE: 1 TO 4-PLAYER ACTION (16-PLAYER ONLINE OR SYSTEM LINK)
DEVELOPER: VOLITION **RELEASE:** JUNE 2 **ESRB:** M

LEVEL: THE WORLD

The Red Faction series is built on the promise of destruction. For the two games that appeared on PlayStation 2, the execution of said promise was tempered by the technological constraints of the hardware. The highest destructive capability empowered the player with the ability to tunnel through dirt and rock.

Red Faction: Guerrilla approaches destruction in a different way. In this experience, players do not tunnel through the underbelly of Mars. In fact, they can't upturn one piece of dirt. The ability to dig holes is replaced with the power to destroy buildings.

The technology behind this ability is far beyond anything you've seen in a game before; it's one of this generation's most significant technological breakthroughs. None of the chaos is scripted. When a building falls, a cloud of smoke doesn't mask its collapse. A rocket blast to a wall doesn't create the same hole each time.

All of the destruction is governed by the laws of gravity and engineering. Every component in a building — whether it's a concrete wall, a metal girder, or glass ceiling — has mass. When you pick away at the base of a skyscraper with a sledgehammer, you'll hear creaks and moans as the weight shifts to the remaining supports. If you ascend a tower overloaded with weight, you'll see the floors buckle from stress. Eventually, gravity and physics take over to cave in or topple the structure. The resulting spectacle is amazing. The screen shakes violently as concrete, steel, and glass tumble and collide, turning

a once pristine workplace into a junkyard of debris.

The destructive magnitude doesn't just deliver chaotic eye candy, it creates an entirely new gaming experience. For someone who has developed the instinct to automatically shoot red barrels, playing the role of a demolition man is a riot, especially when recklessly abandon is applauded.

You can drive trucks through buildings, or tap into a lethal arsenal to mangle metal beyond recognition. No game has come close to empowering the player with this level of destruction. As the game goes on, developer Volition finds ways to push the chaos, and make your jaw drop further.

Remote charges allow you to sculpt explosions like an artist with an eye for urban landscaping. Singularity bombs and rockets create unpredictable (albeit awesome) messes. My favorite approach is to use a mech outfitted with jet boosters. Wildly flailing its arms through a building sends bodies and metal flying through the air. Landing the walker on a building is also quite amusing, as it often weighs more than the roofing, which results in the mech taking an express elevator to the lowest level.

As you destroy Mars' civilizations, you'll be aiding protagonist Alec Mason's mission of liberating the red planet from the Earth Defense Force, a corrupt regime that once freed the planet of the evil Ultor Corporation, only to become evil itself. As you tear down buildings, EDF's standing in the world is reduced, meaning fewer troops to deal with in future missions. The feeling that you are overthrowing an empire is strongly conveyed, giving the player that extra push to crush every EDF possession, even their trashes.

The game's economy is



also nicely tied to the destruction. Fallen structures leave behind salvage that Mason can unload for new weapons and armor upgrades. With new weapons being introduced periodically throughout the story, this system does a good job of pushing the player to veer off of the story to take on side missions and explore the vast open world.

Unfortunately, the boundary separating the critical path and side content is blurred, mostly due to the game's transparent objectives and character motivation. That's not to say that the missions lack excitement. Most are built on the premise of destruction. The gunplay, which is an integral part of this experience, also packs a satisfying wallop.

The single-player campaign is lengthy, and continually rewarding. Don't be surprised, however, if you shun this experience for multiplayer. Wrecking Crew mode is the most enjoyable controller-passing game that I've come across since Burnout's Crash mode. The goal of this mode is to tally as much destruction as you can. Your friends then have to try and beat your score.

On top of this, Red Faction offers 125 ranks worth of depth in its competitive multiplayer. Deathmatching in destructive playgrounds is a powerful proposition that changes the tactics of war. Why bother with a headshot when you can drop a bridge that kills five? Being able to change classes mid-match through backpack pick-ups is also a cool idea that works well with the team-based modes.

No matter what mode you enter, Red Faction: Guerrilla delivers on its promise of destruction, and offers an experience unlike anything else out there. —REINER

Debris can kill you
if you aren't careful



BOTTOM LINE

9

> Concept: Obtain liberation through destruction. The different means to which players can destroy objects is one of this console generation's most impressive shows.

> Graphics: Even if I was getting shot up, I had to stop in my tracks because the building collapsing

> Sound: Sounds are effectively used to enhance the damage. The pounding will give you surround sound setup a workout.

> Playability: The explosive gunplay is polished and precise. Vehicles control well, but the bland terrain doesn't offer much in terms of exciting travel.

> Entertainment: Missions don't offer much build up or variety, but these are minor complaints in a game that lets you over the head with its destruction.

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion 8.5

The EDF liberated Mars, but the victory went to their heads and they now operate with the same sense of authority as the Ultor Corporation they put out of commission. After a startling turn of events, protagonist Alec Mason takes arms in retaliation. His solution? Destroy all the EDF property in sight and shoot every soldier standing in his way. Red Faction Guerrilla delivers thrills on both fronts, with a fantastic selection of weapons with which to spark the revolution and the best destruction engine in video game history. Whether you're planting charges, shooting missiles, using a sledgehammer, or driving a big rig through the building, it will fall. The open world gameplay best resembles Mercenaries 2, but Red Faction overcomes the many technical hurdles that kept that game in mediocrity with sound gunplay and a polished experience. The only detriments holding Guerrilla back are the repetitive mission types, unimaginative art direction, and a detached story — the side missions could have benefited from tangential narratives. Regardless, the grand scale of destruction makes the thrill of laying waste to everything on the planet a must-play experience. —BERTZ

BOTTOM
LINE

8

> **Concept:** It's Thanksgiving in New York, 1991. A ghostly plague brings the city to its knees. Who you gonna call?

> **Graphics:** Authentic. Even the game's new digital props look like they were made by cobbling together fractal stool junk.

> **Sound:** The original four actors do a phenomenal job bringing these characters, and this world, back to life.

> **Playability:** A few cheap shots can send you to the game over screen, but catching ghosts is plenty of fun.

> **Entertainment:** Unfortunately, you won't be able to play as your favorite Ghostbuster during the single-player experience. You can online, but it's not quite the same.

> **Reply Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion 7

I ain't afraid of no ghosts, but I seriously doubt famed parapsychologists Peter Venkman, Egon Spengler, and Ray Stantz feel the same despite their pedigree. Though Ghostbusters does a lot of things right, most notably the creative use of the proton pack, smart script, and great voice acting (Bill Murray's performance in particular stands out), the experience degrades when the battles turn frantic and the ghost attacks overwhelm the hapless Ghostbusters. Playing as the noobie hire, I spent more time reviving my underpowered comedic sidekicks than I did trapping ghosts, especially during difficult boss fights. Had my crew been smart enough to survive in the virtual world as well as they handled the silver screen, this may have been worthy of the Ghostbusters brand. As it is, this mediocre simulator completely mars the otherwise fine recreation of a classic flick.—BEN



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII

Ghostbusters

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER ACTION (4-PLAYER ONLINE) > **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
> **DEVELOPER:** TERMINAL REALITY > **RELEASE JUNE 17** > **ESRB T**

THE FLOWERS ARE STILL STANDING

It was hard to be an adolescent in the '80s and not develop a fondness for these paranormal psychologists. As soon as Ray Parker Jr.'s synthesized theme started with, "When there's something strange..." I couldn't stop the well of child-like delight that bubbled out of me. As Ray and Egon bantered back and forth, I'd almost forgotten the last two decades ever happened. It really was 1991, and I was hanging out with my childhood idols. This is the ultimate Ghostbuster's fan festival.

The story is a mix of throwbacks to the old films and creative new bits that fit right into the myths. As the silent new recruit, you follow the team around New York's most popular haunts. With a governmental oversight committee breathing down their neck and a ghost named Shandor making a muck of the city, it's no surprise they need the extra hands.

As the new blood, you are the Ghostbuster's guinea pig, testing out all their new equipment. The upshot is that you get a lot of sweet new toys to play with, like the stasis stream, which basically works like a freeze ray. Fans will also recognize the slime blower from the second film, which you'll use to tether objects in the environment in order to solve many of the game's puzzles.

Tons of great scripted moments help sell this

experience. I scaled the side of a building and shot down the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man, and explored a basement where monsters made entirely out of coal jump out of the furnaces. All the while Ray Stantz freaks out like a dork about paranormal phenomena and Peter Venkman delivers sarcastic one-liners. The repartee from all four original actors sell every minute of the game in which they are onscreen.

I only wish as much love and care had gone into crafting the gameplay. The mechanics Terminal Reality developed around capturing ghosts work well; I had fun slinging ghosts against the furniture, wrangling them into traps, and making a mess of any room I stepped into. But I wasn't always trapping ghosts. You spend a lot of the time shooting down annoying bat-like anomalies or other pithy creatures that don't require trapping. The health system feels widely unbalanced as well, and you find yourself on the ground without warning. The other Ghostbusters can resurrect you, but

they aren't any better at dodging these cheap shots than you are, so if you all go down together (and you will) it's game over. Most of the time it feels like you're doing all the work, which has the adverse effect of making you feel more powerful than these legendary heroes.

If you can put up with these annoyances, the game rewards you with its moody atmosphere and epic encounters. A few multiplayer modes pit you against other players to trap ghosts and survive waves of enemies, but the only real draw is getting to play as the four main Ghostbusters. The real meat of the game is getting to play through the Ghostbusters experience we always dreamed about as kids — a story that could have easily been *Ghostbusters III*.—BEN

Wii version



The Wii Difference

6.5

The Wii follows the same general story, but its wacky character models make this look like a wildly different title. The camera lock-on and Wii-exclusive split screen co-op are nice additions, but the simplified combat and truncated levels ultimately leave this game a little flat. The Wii provides a Ghostbusters experience, but it's not the Real Ghostbusters experience.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360 | WII

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10

• STYLING 1 TO 4-PLAYER MODES / 4-PLAYER ONLINE •
• DEVELOPER EA TIBURON • RELEASE JUNE 16 • ESRB E

TAKE THE TOUR

For the first time in next-gen Tiger: Rain.

X Replay

Golfers are always searching for more consistency in their game. Last year's Tiger wasn't one of my favorites, but for the sake of consistency, developer EA Tiburon sticks with the concept put in place in 09. I consider Hank Haney and the variable skill system mistakes worth correcting, but EA clearly doesn't, going forward with more modest additions instead. Tiger 10 is a predictable, yet skillful, par putt instead of a thrilling Tiger-at-Augusta moment.

Ironically, Tiger 10's main addition is the incorporation of real-life elements, whether it's Tiger talking about big moments in his career, the U.S. Open, six new courses, or the replication of tour moments (with real pros instead of EA's made-up characters) as integrated in this year's version of Tiger Challenges. I've always appreciated the series'

ability to simultaneously strive for realism while at the same time not take itself too seriously. These real-life elements are subtle yet effective at putting you in the PGA without losing some of Tiger's more tongue-in-cheek principles, like getting a stat bump by wearing a bunny suit. This year the game funneled me toward playing PGA tour events quicker than previous Tiger iterations — another small move towards emphasizing real life.

As effective as these tweaks are, they aren't monumental enough to make you jump out of your golf cart. In fact, one of the more hyped changes is conspicuous by its understated nature. The touted

precision putting feature is nothing revolutionary, but merely a new HUD to represent your swing while putting. Likewise, the inclusion of rain is not unwelcome, rather it's simply strange that it hasn't happened before on next-gen systems.

Tiger 10's place in the franchise's history is such that making mountains out of molehills is necessary, because this year's game covers a lot of bases — except for the long-asked-for create-a-course feature. The online portion that jumps started by continuously rolling tournaments that come in daily and weekly flavors. There's even a way you can try and match the pros' scores as they are posted from wherever the tour is that week (no putt preview or spin here). It's no online tour, but it's a step in the right direction; the kind of slow progress we're seeing in the franchise these days. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE 8.5

> **Concept:** This year's game makes a few updates to the formula, but it's not a big leap forward

> **Graphics:** The new rain effects are welcome, and they're...gray

> **Sound:** Tiger 10 uses the same announcing team as last year, and I don't know that people care

> **Playability:** The new putting mechanic isn't really that new, it's simply an additional display

> **Entertainment:** Incorporating Tiger interviews, the U.S. Open, and more emphasis on real-life golf pros is a nice touch

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion 8.5

Golf is more static than team sports like football or baseball. With no roster updates to guarantee a new purchase each year, the Tiger series has to succeed or fail on its new features. This year brings back most of what we saw in Tiger 09, with a few key changes. The new putting mechanic seeks to reconcile the natural feel of an analog swing with the precision of a three-click mechanic, and largely succeeds. The Tiger Challenge is replaced with Tournament Challenge mode, in which players recreate historic moments like Tiger's long putt at the 2001 TPC tournament at Sawgrass. While it's functionally identical, I like the expanded context, which makes the challenges feel more meaningful. Online now features weekly and daily worldwide tournaments that even incorporate real-world PGA events as they happen. Throw in the inclusion of the U.S. Open and real-time weather effects, and you've got yet another solid entry for the series. Still, more casual fans might be forgiven for experiencing a sense of déjà vu. At a certain point, you begin to wonder how much further this accomplished franchise can take the sport. —MATT

TOURNAMENT CHALLENGE

0 Points Earned / 0% Complete / 1 min.

- Adam Scott 2 Points
- Tiger Woods 3 Points
- Luke Donald 4 Points
- Jim Furyk 5 Points

This year's Tiger Challenge revolves around real-life tour moments and the pros involved in them (although you complete them with your created character), and Tiger does video intros for the challenges which feature him

2001 THE PLAYERS Championship

THE WII DIFFERENCE

8.5

Wii MotionPlus is a great boon to the Wii version of Tiger — the game is merely a 7 without it. The peripheral allows for fidelity of swing to the point where controlling draw/fade is easy and accurate, and taking something off your shots for a precise approach shot makes MotionPlus a must for this game. The rest of this Wii version of Tiger is the same (including the online tournaments), although what it lacks in the Gamernet feature it makes up for in an older skill system that I personally prefer to the newer Hank Haney one.



XBOX 360 | PC

Velvet Assassin

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SOUTHPeAK GAMES > DEVELOPER REPLAY STUDIOS
 > RELEASE APRIL 30 > ESRB M



THE HORRORS OF WAR

Vou shouldn't feel bad if Violette and her stealthy World War II title caught your eye. Those screens sure look cool. The concept of a female secret agent taking out Nazis has some promise. Plus, she's got that sexy spy thing going for her, right? First looks can be deceiving. Velvet Assassin is a mess from beginning to end, filled with frustrating objectives, archaic gameplay conventions, and a story that is, well, not a story at all.

Stealth/action gamers will be familiar with most of the gameplay ideas present in Velvet Assassin, mostly because they all come from titles that released 10 years ago. Violette sneaks through one disconnected mission after another, each filled with even more frustratingly long checkpoints. Laughably bad AI soldiers march to their doom again and again; I once saw three soldiers walk one after another into an electrified pool of water and die. At other times, the baddies show an uncanny sense of detection, spotting you behind walls dozens of feet away. If you are sighted, it's often best to just take your medicine and wait for the checkpoint reload — Violette is a far too fragile heroine to survive in any real showdown.

At one point, you must sneak out of a fortified compound. You need a firearm to assure her escape. Alas, Violette can't take any of the dozens of machine guns she finds on the bodies of men she stabs. Instead, she sneaks past the actual exit from the compound (it's right there, stupid!) and back into harm's way, only to retrieve from a locker a weapon identical to the ones she's been shunning on dead bodies. Then she has to shoot her way back to the exit. Brilliant.

As Velvet Assassin's story unfolds, a realization begins to dawn. Events have nothing to tie them together. No overarching plot shapes your gameplay experience. Instead, these are vignettes devoid of character or emotional resonance. Violette is wandering through a world without context or meaning, horrified by what she finds in her journeys, but marshalling on for reasons even she cannot explain. In this, at least, the game succeeds at making the player share the fate and feelings of its protagonist.—MILLER



BOTTOM LINE **5.25**

> Concept: Slog through the most tedious and frustrating version of World War II you can imagine

> Graphics: A high point in an otherwise lackluster title — lighting and overall visual quality is right up there

> Sound: Solid voiceover work for Violette, but she's pretty much the only character in the game you can listen to

> Playability: Controls are okay, but everything about the action feels off date

> Entertainment: Do what Violette does — break out the morphine before diving in

> Replay Value: Low

Second Opinion **4**

If early stealth games were like this 10 years ago, the genre would have collapsed before it even had the chance to take off. Missions range from completely forgettable (go get some papers) to absolutely ridiculous (go murder captured British agents before they can talk, you know, instead of rescuing them). Here's just a sampling of the rest of the problems: idiotic AI, embarrassing attempts at pathos, imperceptible upgrades, no transition animations, constant trial and error, poorly placed checkpoints, experience is tied to collecting crap instead of spy activities, you can't take weapons from enemies, and you're forced to run around in a rigidity for the last two levels.—BRYAN

MULTI QUICKIES

Wii | NINTENDO DS

Professor Heinz Wolff's Gravity

> STYLE 1-PLAYER PUZZLE
 > PUBLISHER DEEP SILVER
 > DEVELOPER EXTRA MILE STUDIOS
 > RELEASE APRIL 6 > ESRB E



BOTTOM LINE

6.75

It's an interesting concept: players must place various blocks and pieces on the playfield to guide a falling marble towards a switch. For a time, it's an engaging, unique puzzle game. However, the touchy controls, coupled with an uneven difficulty curve, result in a game that fails to live up to its promise.—MATT

edge **5.5**

(With All Games Aren't Created Equal)

The Wii control scheme isn't perfect, but the botched DS implementation is far worse, forcing you to use the d-pad to both scroll around the screen and adjust the pitch of your pieces.

PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Terminator Salvation

> STYLE 1-OR 2-PLAYER ACTION
 > PUBLISHER EQUITY GAMES
 PRODUCTION/INVOLVED/EVOLVED GAMES/WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT
 > DEVELOPER GRIN ENTERTAINMENT
 > RELEASE MAY 20 > ESRB T



BOTTOM LINE

5.5

In the early '90s, I played a crappy Terminator game for the Sega CD. It started in a decayed future and featured a host of tired gameplay mechanics. It's funny that the Terminator franchise deals with time paradoxes, because history seems to have repeated itself. Based on the new movie, Salvation has you filling John Connor's shoes and battling the nigh-omnipotent forces of Skynet as the machines start taking the guise of humans. If robots ever do take over, I hope the human race doesn't succumb to a force this stupid. Most encounters have you jumping between cover while the machines stand in the middle of an open field. While the cover system is kind of cool and the co-op option is nice, the rest of the title is a mess of long loads and low production values. If only we could send a death machine back in time to kill this game before it was born.—BEN



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER FIGHTING (2-PLAYER ON INF)
 > PUBLISHER AKSIS GAMES > DEVELOPER ARC SYSTEM WORKS > RELEASE JUNE 30
 > ESRB T

WHO NEEDS DRUGS?

A young vigilante boy who comes around a life-sized mannequin he refers to as his sister. A vampire whose talking pet cat morphs into an umbrella during combat. A tips mode entitled, "Teach me, Boobie Lady!"

If you were looking for proof that Japanese developer Arc System Works is insane, here it is. Fortunately for the rest of us, BlazBlue also doubles as an enjoyable fighting game.

The story begins in the 13th Hierarchical City of Kagutsuchi, a mystical world where humanity has infused technology with powerful magic called Armaguns — alight! Who knows what! Who cares? BlazBlue's longwinded mess of a story will make you appreciate how most fighters keep a narrative simple. The real thrill here is the frantic one-on-one combat.

Anyone familiar with Arc System Work's Guilty Gear titles will feel at home here. This 2D brawler has some of the hottest animations, a host of outlandish attacks, and gorgeous mixed 2D/3D backgrounds. Unfortunately, mastering the combat system requires a fair amount of dedicated erudition. Blaz can be a fairly defensive fighter — a wide variety of different counters, cancels, and blocks complicate the battle system, and newcomers will take their lumps before mastering the intricacies of each character's special drive attacks. In the hands of an expert fighter this game is stunning, but joystick jockeys who are out of shape might want to start an intense training regimen.—BEN

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> Concept: Hyper 2D fighting meets a psychedelic nightmare

> Graphics: The game's varied backgrounds are a mesmerizing mix of 2D images and actual 3D models

> Sound: The Japanese tradition of having high-pitched actors voice anime characters holds firm

> Playability: Throwing special attacks on the nail-sting stick helps even the playing field for beginners, though I can imagine someone will complain about it

> Entertainment: Dedicated fans will be able to take their skills online to face off against opponents from all over the globe, beat leaderboard scores, and watch live matches

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion 7.75

Am I playing 2D fighting games or a drug-induced gothic hallucination?

BlazBlue features a stable of improbable characters using improbable attacks to beat each other up in satisfying ways. Underneath the slick designs and outlandish action is a challenging and complex fighter, but don't expect the game to help you discover its depth. Learning the ropes is a slow and aggravating grind, especially since many characters have unique mechanics that don't transfer to the others. This variety can be rewarding to master, but also significantly increases the time you'll need to invest if you want to become more than a button-masher. If you're only playing solo or against your friends online, that level of skill isn't necessary — you can just enjoy the beautiful visuals and stylish attacks that admirably follow in Guilty Gear's footsteps.—JOE



PLAYSTATION 3 | XBOX 360

Fuel

> **STYLE:** 1-PLAYER RACING (16-PLAYER ONLINE)
 > **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS > **DEVELOPER:** ASOBO STUDIOS > **RELEASE MAY 27** > **ESRB:** E

LOOKING FOR DIRECTIONS



t's a big world out there, and few are larger than Fuel's. As massive as this title's map is, it's natural that you're going to get lost. But aimlessness isn't necessarily what you want to hear when talking about a video game. Fuel delivers on its main points by offering a world full of races and exploration, but it lacks the context that has helped make recent Codemasters racing titles such as Grid great.

Fuel's world is split into camps, which are areas carved out of the game's map. Although you can freely drive through all the camps in the free ride mode (which you can switch in and out of at any time), each camp has its own career races and bonus challenges. Both of these are accessed via a menu or by coming across them naturally by driving around. Performing well in races earns you more fuel, which is the in-game currency you use to purchase the horde of vehicles and unlock new camps.

I played Fuel methodically — I would dust off most of the career races and some of the challenges within each camp before moving on to the next one. I wasn't satisfied with simply roaming around the map looking for whatever came my

Not only is Fuel's terrain a part of the race, but the game does a good job of throwing in jumps and obstacles, like broken down cars.



way — although you can certainly do that. I just don't find it that interesting to hunt down the liveries, challenges, and fuel hidden in the wilderness, which often feels like a chore. This undercuts the effectiveness of Fuel's open structure.

The online portion also works against the sense of freedom the game attempts to convey. Meeting someone and getting into a race isn't as seamless as in Burnout Paradise or Test Drive Unlimited, and you can often miss a friend even if you're in

the same location. Similarly, the entire offline game experience feels disjointed due to the loading between free ride and career modes, as well as every time you crash — which the game doesn't even show you.

Fuel may not have hit the mark in its structure, but the racing itself is fun. Races are fast, cross-country affairs that show off the game's true strength: its varied terrain. You're free to take any path to hit a checkpoint, but most of the time you'll stick to the main one, with a few detours along the way. In order to win fuel you have to come in first, which unfortunately discourages true exploration and risk-taking during a race, since going off the beaten path can cost you valuable positions. Races often have their moments, however, whether it's a tornado set piece that tears through a level or when you find a clever route that no one has discovered.

Some gamers may appreciate the freedom Fuel gives you, but I feel like the lack of payoff and context blunts any adventurous feelings I have. —KATO

BOTTOM LINE **7.75**

> **Concept:** Let racers tackle a large open world scattered with races, collectible objects, and varying terrain

> **Graphics:** Some ground effects suffer from pop-up like the changing color tones as the game goes in and out of night

> **Sounds:** The default generic guitar riffs will give you a bigger headache than sucking exhaust fumes

> **Playability:** The game encourages you to buy lots of vehicles to find the right fit for your driving style and the course layout

> **Entertainment:** Fuel gives you many options in exploring its open world, but that doesn't necessarily mean you are spoiled for choice

> **Replay Value:** High

Second Opinion **7.25**

Fuel offers a lot to explore, and that's the one big thing the game has going for it. Dozens of interconnected roads and trails crisscross their way through the devastated landscape of post-weather-apocalypse America. All sorts of car, truck, and offroad vehicles populate your pool of available rides, and there are plenty of varied race types to drive through.

It's an ambitious approach to a racing game, full of original ideas, particularly in the seemingly endless Challenge races that pop up all over the world. Unfortunately, those fresh concepts are hampered by some shoddy fundamentals. No matter which vehicle you drive, the physics always feel floaty and gripless. Difficulty balancing for the AI drivers feels too hard in one race, only to have you leave everyone in the dust in the next. The game reloads every time you cash — a strange holdover from an earlier era in racing games. And unbearable music and a strange lack of personality in an otherwise compelling setting, and Fuel feels like a smartly built car that's running on fumes. —MILLER

Searching for and finding a Doppler truck means all the camp liveries, visit points, or challenges will automatically appear on your map.





BOTTOM LINE

> Sound: With on-court announcers and broadcasters, this is the best sounding tennis game to date.

> Playability: One minute you're painting the corners, the next you're throwing the Wii remote in frustration.

> Entertainment: A definite upgrade over other Wii tennis games, but it won't be contending for the #1 ranking any time soon.

> Replay Value: Moderate.

Second Opinion

7

Even with Wii MotionPlus, Grand Slam Tennis isn't as precise as it needs to be. Nintendo's new peripheral makes a difference for shot placement and the application of spin on shot, but it doesn't mend this game's inability to correctly interpret your motions every time. One minute, the game has a firm grasp on my play style. I painted lines and made Nadal look like a fool. The next minute, my character looked like he lost his vision mid-match. My swings and envisioned placement of the ball were not being read as intended. The AI controlling your player's movement is also spotty. When this game works, it can be a lot of fun, not to mention a full-blown workout for people who take full swings like I do (the game even keeps track of calories burned). When this game isn't capturing your intent, you'll likely channel John McEnroe for a tantrum. Grand Slam Tennis is a more enjoyable and complete tennis experience than Wii Sports' offering, but take that with a grain of salt. Neither delivers a truly satisfying or skill-laden game of tennis. —REINER



Grand Slam Tennis

> STYLE: 1 TO 4 PLAYER SPORTS (2-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EA SPORTS > DEVELOPER EA CANADA
> RELEASE JUNE 8 > ESRB E

BIG HOPES AND BROKEN RACKETS

EAs first foray on the Wii hardcourt is the Richie Tenenbaum of tennis games. Like the volatile child from *The Royal Tenenbaums*, Grand Slam Tennis shows moments of brilliance, but inconsistent gameplay leads to mild frustration, which eventually boils into on-court temper tantrums and full-blown meltdowns.

The disgruntlement stems from the game's sporadic controls. The concept is simple: As you mimic forehands and backhands with the Wii remote, the game reads the speed and timing of your swing and the controller's angle to determine the shot's pace and the type of spin. Depending on the angle, you can hit a flat groundstroke, slice the ball, or use topspin. Your swing almost always results in contact, but how and where you hit the ball is a game of chance. Swinging early frequently drives the ball cross-court, but I never found a sweet spot for driving a passing shot down the sideline or using the intended English.

The Wii MotionPlus-enhanced control also presents its share of problems. While it mimics your

racket moves well when you start a match, it suffers unpredictable disruptions over time, resulting in your player holding the racket awkwardly away from his or her body between shots and swinging a backhand when your ideal shot is obviously a forehand.

When you're fighting for every point against legends like Pete Sampras, rage is hard to avoid. We tried several remotes on multiple systems, and the problem always arose during extended play sessions.

With the standard control scheme, players have no control over movement once the ball is in play, which creates another level of frustration. Players have trouble setting up for a shot, often over-pursuing, which forces you to adjust on the fly just to get the racket on the ball. Plugging in the nunchuk gives you control, but you might strangle yourself with the cord while trying to serve the ball, and hitting groundstrokes with a cord attached is awkward.

The Grand Slam Tennis career mode is short,

featuring only the four major tournaments, but EA extends the experience with exhibition matches and minigames to give your created player more chances to improve. Players earn skill stars by hitting winners, so even if you lose a few matches early in your career you can still upgrade your player. By defeating a pro like Pete Sampras, you can unlock his special ability and add it to your repertoire. This creative approach to character development works quite well, encouraging you to gamble on big shots in hopes of upgrading faster. Players can also take on friends online, track burned calories with fitness challenges, or enjoy the dozen Tennis Party minigames.

While the Grand Slam Tennis controls don't have the chops to hang with the likes of Federer or Sharapova, the game is a definite upgrade for casual gamers who want a deeper tennis experience than Wii Sports. —BERTZ





Wii

Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER LUCASARTS > DEVELOPER A2M > RELEASE JUNE 9 > ESRB T

ANOTHER NUKED FRIDGE

When a player inserts Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings into his or her Wii, the Archaeological Institute of America should be on hand to present an alternative: Play this game, or open the Ark of the Covenant. One choice brings instant face-melting death; the other inflicts a thousand lifetimes of pain and suffering upon a person's inner Indy fan. Choose wisely.

This may seem like a lose-lose proposition, but believe it or not, there is reason to invest in the game. If you dig around in its menus, you'll find the classic PC adventure game Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis tucked away in the special features. Losing none of its magic since 1992, this port utilizes the Wii's IR functionality to secure flawless navigation for the conversation trees, menus, and environment interaction. Like most adventure games, Fate of Atlantis is paced in molasses. It puts heavy emphasis on brain-twisting puzzles, and features an extensive narrative (which is penned brilliantly and accompanied by spoken dialogue). The slow pacing may be a turn off to some, but the time you invest is justified with huge payoffs surrounding the Atlantean and Indiana Jones mythologies. All told, Fate of Atlantis is a finely crafted Indiana Jones experience that does the license proud.

Staff of Kings is the exact opposite. If you thought that the latest film, *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, was a stretch for the famed fedora, this game will twist your perception to the nitty to the point that it would make sense for him to French kiss a cobra.

The only aspect that sings of the archeologist's exploits is the object of desire: Moses' staff, a religious artifact that plays off Indy's phobia of snakes. It's a perfect match, yet the narrative seems to be afraid of it, as the story is pushed to the side to such a degree that some scenes don't even conclude. I guess we're supposed to use our imagination to form our own conclusions.

This butherford tale takes Indy to temples and crypts set in Turkey, Panama, and Nepal. All are festooned with gorgeous architecture and sites to marvel. But the architects all make the same mistake of creating booby-traps with obvious workarounds. Nothing kills an adventure vibe more than bad puzzles, and Staff of Kings specializes in them.

Whenever Indy would crack his whip at a foe, I expected to see the Three Stooges join into the fight. The fisticuffs, which boil down to Indy and his foes swinging ridiculous props at each other, end up being comical. The sordid controls that fuel your swings don't help either.

Gunplay boils down to Duck Hunt without any moving targets. Point. Shoot. And move on to the next lame shooting gallery. Driving and flying offer little in terms of gameplay outside of the harrowing challenge: Can you drive or fly straight?

Only approach this game if you intend to play Fate of Atlantis. Staff of Kings hardly finds the Indiana Jones pulse.—REINER

BOTTOM LINE **5**

> **Concept:** An unintentionally comedic adventure game designed for people who want to like puzzles but don't want to put thought into them

> **Graphics:** In addition to the best "bad sweat stain" in video games, most of the temples are rich in details, and the motorcycle chase delivers a jaw-dropping drop.

> **Sound:** Indy grunts far too much. Truth be told, it gets uncomfortable when he scales cliffs. However, the orchestrated score is music to Indy fans' ears

> **Playability:** Mostly functional. Combat, driving, flying, and whip cracking are all handled poorly

> **Entertainment:** Play it for Fate of Atlantis or don't play it at all

> **Reply Value:** Low



Second Opinion **4.5**

Poor Indy. If Dr. Jones knew George Lucas was going to ruin his reputation with *The Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* and the Staff of Kings, he would have opted for a retirement home. This travesty finds our favorite archaeologist chasing through San Francisco, Panama, Turkey, and Nepal in search of the staff Moses used to part the Red Sea. Along the way, he's barraged with terrible shooting mechanics, tough-to-control vehicle chases, weak platforming, mindlessly easy puzzles, and uninspired level designs. The graphics and sound don't fare any better, with frequent stunted animations and skipping voiceovers. With gameplay this hadenre and frustrating, you're better off playing the classic graphical adventure *The Fate of Atlantis*, which is included on the disc.—BERTZ

Gunplay boils down to Duck Hunt without any moving targets. Point. Shoot. And move on to the next lame shooting gallery. Driving and flying offer little in terms of gameplay outside of the harrowing challenge: Can you drive or fly straight?

Only approach this game if you intend to play Fate of Atlantis. Staff of Kings hardly finds the Indiana Jones pulse.—REINER

Wii

Let's Tap

> STYLE 1 TO 4-PLAYER PARTY > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER PROPE > RELEASE JUNE 16 > ESRB E



LET'S DO SOMETHING ELSE

BOTTOM LINE **5.5**

*L*e'ts Tap represents gaming legend Yuji Naka's return to hands-on game design after climbing the corporate ladder at Sega and leaving to start his own company, Prope. The simple idea of laying a Wii remote facedown on a box, tapping on said box, and creating minigames based on these vibration inputs is certainly clever, but Prope shouldn't have put all of its eggs in one basket...er, box.

The first of five minigames, Tap Runner, sounds great on paper. Players drum lightly to make a little man run through an obstacle course and hit harder to jump. Easy enough for everyone to play, right? I had to go through at least two dozen configurations tweaking the in-game sensitivity, swapping out different boxes, yanking the rubber remote jacket off, and even trying out some drum sticks. Eventually, I settled on a serviceable configuration, but even then it felt like I had only about 85 percent control of the proceedings.

Rhythym Tap is almost an exact copy of Donkey Kong, as players drum along to game scrolling from right to left. All 16 infectious electro tracks are fun to play, but the experience is easy to blast through in less than an hour. Thankfully you can ignore the tap strength directions on the notes, otherwise this game would be ruined, too.

Silent Blocks focuses around a tower of multicolored hexagon pancakes. With gameplay this hadenre and frustrating, you're better off playing the classic graphical adventure *The Fate of Atlantis*, which is included on the disc.—BRYAN

tiles. This has the same spotty control issues as Tap Runner except it's not separated into discrete levels so you have to start over from the beginning every time. Also, it's absolutely no fun.

The strangest thing of all on Let's Tap is the Visualizer. This is essentially a glorified screensaver that lets you launch fireworks, splash some water around, bounce balls, or splatter paint and ink on a canvas. That's it. I simply can't imagine anyone trying this mode for more than five minutes unless they were on illicit drugs. Perhaps you could say the same for the entirety of Let's Tap.—MATT



Second Opinion **3**

I'm not going to mince words. This game is terrible. It's not just that the mechanics work poorly—and believe me, they barely work at all—it's that the concept itself is so dumb I can't imagine how this game got approved in the first place. But, for the sake of argument, let's imagine there is someone out there whose idea of fun is playing shallow minigames by banging on a Kleenex box. Even this fictional person would have to laugh at Let's Tap's sloppy control. Perhaps someone at Sega should have known that it's a bad sign when it's difficult to do something as simple as selecting options in the menus.—MATT

BOTTOM LINE

8

Wii

Little King's Story

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/STRATEGY > PUBLISHER XSEED > DEVELOPER CING, INC.

> RELEASE JULY 21 > ESRB T

IT'S GOOD TO BE KING

Little King's Story is one of the most intriguing games of the year, and for good reason. At its best it takes the good things about Harvest Moon and Animal Crossing—the feeling of controlling and interacting with a virtual world—while giving you some actual gameplay and a sense of purpose. From atop the throne, you can oversee your expanding empire, build new homes and industrial buildings (useful for creating new unit types like merchants and miners), and even preside over marriages for lovestruck citizens. While the game isn't extremely deep, it creates a great sense of place, especially when you see NPCs taking part in post-boss-fight celebrations or solemn funerals.

While village life is engaging, the meat of the game takes place on the road, exploring for new items, treasures, and taking on enemies to conquer the six rival kings that populate the land. In this portion of the game, Little King's Story plays like Pikmin, which has you leading a gang of followers and issuing basic commands like attack and retreat. At first, it's basic—just face the baddie and send your minions running. However, as the game opens up you must make decisions about which units to take in your squad (each unit has special abilities, be it the hunters' ranged attacks or the miners' ability to break through rock obstacles). Later on, you

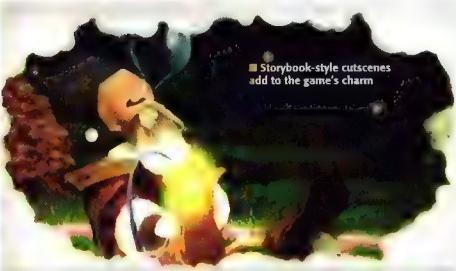
can upgrade your units, either through further construction of buildings that spawn advanced units or through dropped items that give stat buffs. Eventually, you can use different battle formations and techniques to give you a further advantage.

When everything works, it's a great balance. The city building/sim elements are light enough not to bog down the momentum, but keep you invested in building your kingdom. While the combat and world exploration aren't exactly deep, there is a layer of strategy in play when determining which units to take with you on the next missions. In addition, the boss battles put you to the test using classic attack/defend patterns gleaned from old-school platformers.



Sadly, things don't always run as smoothly as they should. Your troops are plagued by control and pathfinding issues that make combat a frustrating experience at times. You hold down the Z button to bring up your king's targeting cursor, which is so erratic you frequently send troops running towards nothing instead of the enemy one inch in front of them. The pathfinding issues are worse; your troops can't manage to circumnavigate even the smallest obstacles, meaning that battles frequently devolve into total chaos. While certain unit types are more effective against certain enemies, there's no good way to quickly change between unit groups.

While it's not perfect, the more I think about Little King's Story the more inclined I am to focus on the good things than the bad. While I'm certainly hoping for a more refined control scheme next time (perhaps using the pointer functionality of the remote), I can't fault a game that offers such a fun, engaging, and lengthy adventure on the Wii. —MATT



Second Opinion

8

A kingdom run by the edicts of pre-teens really may sound like a disaster, but after spending some time with the Little King, I'm ready to bend my knee and offer my allegiance. Little King's Story is a fascinating game that skims from the top of multiple genres to create an addictive adventure in a world teeming with activity. When you aren't engaging in Harvest Moon-style simulation, you're leading a battalion of specialized citizens in a quest to explore and unify the world under your kingdom's banner. The variety in available jobs is impressive, and I loved the light strategy involved in deciding which ones to bring along for a particular expedition. You can spend hours gathering treasure and completing side quests before advancing the story, but the pacing doesn't suffer since the game does a good job entwining your goals. For all of its charm, Little King's Story hits a wall when it comes to the control scheme. Touchy and inconsistent targeting completely ruins certain fights and even poisons some non-combat scenarios. The endearing gameplay overcomes these problems and provides a great experience regardless, but a proper interface could have transformed this quirky underdog into a king among games.—JOE

Battlestations Pacific

> STYLE I-PLAYER ACTION STRATEGY (8-PLAYER ONLINE) > PUBLISHER EIDOS/WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE
 > DEVELOPER EIDOS HUNGARY > RELEASE MAY 12 > ESRB T



DEEP SIXED

Battlestations Midway impressed wannabe midshipmen by giving them reigns of a navy and letting them orchestrate battles. For the rest of us, the lack of compelling combat had us praying for shore leave. Battlefront Pacific picks up where Midway left off, giving naval buffs the opportunity to put on their best Admiral Nimitz impersonation by directing and controlling fighter squadrons, battleships, and submarines.

Pacific features two unique campaigns: One focuses on the U.S. Navy's success against Japan in World War II. A second explores an alternate history that relives the bombing of Pearl Harbor from the eyes of the aggressors and subsequently follows a Japanese campaign, a peculiar direction I'm not sure many Americans are keen to experience save for giving a kamikaze plane a test run. The missions in both campaigns stick to basic military objectives—escort fleets, conduct bombing runs, defend bases—with secondary and hidden objectives that help boost your overall mission rating and unlock new naval and air units.

Players must juggle issuing orders to units while controlling individual units to aid in

the onslaught. The tactical map helps you direct your army more quickly, but the user interface does a poor job of indicating which fleets you can control. Some missions include AI-controlled allies, and the game never differentiates clearly between those units and yours. Planes and ships typically follow orders, but occasional AI bugs derail the units, and the battles devolve into tedious micromanagement. AI-controlled destroyer ships have a hard time navigating around shallow island shores, and your aircraft often fly aimlessly after completing objectives rather than staying in the fray.

When the workload is split between four players in online multiplayer, it's much easier to keep units on task and take in battle from the view of a cockpit or battleship rather than the ugly tactical map. The five multiplayer modes and eight scaleable maps give fans a lot of replay value, but the game's fundamental flaw is still intact: boring gameplay. Bombing runs can be fun, but navigating slow ships with even slower ammo reloads and babysitting units doesn't add up to a riveting experience.

Count this bored midshipman out.—BERTZ



BOTTOM LINE

6

> **Concept:** Command naval and aviation fleets to dominate the high seas in WWII

> **Graphics:** Blurry textures, unimpressive destruction, and an ugly HUD

> **Sound:** A lost opportunity. Even the strategy title Empire Total War has better open sea battles

> **Playability:** Planes fly well, but ships move too slowly and submaraines handle poorly

> **Entertainment:** The lackluster action won't impress anyone but die-hard naval buffs

> **Replay Value:** Moderate

Second Opinion

6

If you want to simulate the intensity of Battlestations' open seas combat, go to an old folk's horn and watch the old women run into each other with their walkers; these WWII duels are confused, plodding affairs. While the aerial aspect is faster, the controls are still a mess. The game delivers some interesting moments, like when you're forced to fly through a barrage of explosive canon fire, but most of the game makes WWII look like a series of antebiotic skirmishes. The most frustrating aspect of the game is how temble your aim is at following orders. You can issue commands to any unit under your command, but when you check on them two minutes later, you might find them spinning circles in a desolate section of the map. Combining light RTS elements with real-time aerial, battleship, and submarine combat is a solid idea. Maybe with more meeting action, smarter AI, and less generic graphics that combination would work.—BEN



PC

Cryostasis

> STYLE I-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER 1C COMPANY/ASPRY > DEVELOPER ACTION FORMS
 > RELEASE APRIL 28 > ESRB T

A RADICAL DEPARTURE

Cryostasis is anything but another action-heavy FPS, despite its first-person perspective and occasional gunplay. Judged on the technical merits of its combat or design of its puzzles, the game is a brutal failure. However, to do so would utterly miss the point of the game. Cryostasis ably uses its unique gameplay structure to explore the tale of a doomed ship, the stories of its crew during their final hours, and the faceless terror of unending, unfreezing deadly cold.

As players explore the ice-bound ship, the frozen corpes of her crew demand closure. By touching their lifeless bodies, players can relive their late owner's last moments. These brief vignettes involve overcoming fear or cowardice, sacrificing oneself for the good of others, or otherwise being a more moral human being.

Upon completion, whatever mistakes made in the past are rectified and a portion of the ship returns to heat and life. The quality of these episodes is uneven, but overall this unusual mechanic is used quite well.

Paralleled to the revivification of the ship, a fable is relayed to the player via scraps of paper that kick off narrated illustrations. This story of a primitive tribe fleeing enemies through a hostile, ancient forest is a clear allegory to the trials of the icebreaker's crew. As

heavy-handed as the moralizing can be at times, this secondary tale provides a useful additional perspective to the main story.

An excellent, visceral presentation ties all of these elements together into a powerful interactive experience that pushes storytelling in a direction that would be impossible in another medium. Full-screen visual effects like freezing fog and frost rim your view, and the crackle of crisp, hard ice combined with the audible shivering of your avatar, hammer home the idea of deadly cold. In contrast, the warm glow of a fire and the babbling of free-flowing water elicit primal relief. Few games have triggered such a strong emotional response in me, and that list is filled with classics like BioShock and Baldur's Gate II.

Unlike those timeless titles, Cryostasis fails to deliver engaging gameplay to accompany its story. The demon-like enemies, while apt enough in their personification of the evils that the crew brought on themselves, are brainlessly simple to slay. Similarly, the puzzles cleverly illustrate elements of the story but require little creative thought to solve. Go into Cryostasis with the right attitude, though, and you'll be well rewarded.—ADAM

BOTTOM LINE

8

> **Concept:** Slowly restore life and heat to a frozen nuclear icebreaker in a surreal Russian morality play

> **Graphics:** Lots of little touches convey the horror of relentless cold and the relief of finding a heat source remarkably well

> **Sound:** Great audio design makes listening to your environment as important as keeping your eyes open

> **Playability:** The limited action is terrible, but that's not the point

> **Entertainment:** Though it's barely technically competent, this is a fantastic example of games striving to be more than shallow entertainment

> **Replay Value:** Moderately Low

Second Opinion

7.5

Cryostasis will surprise you if you give it a chance. Sure, it's got a cheesy name and I hadn't heard a damn thing about it before I played it, but it certainly has a unique hook and plenty of scares. Thumbs up for the freezing atmosphere, ship hacking mechanics, and contained flashbacks that affect the present in interesting ways. It's too bad that the melee and shooting mechanics are unrefined and the battle flow gets repetitive over time. If you're looking for something a little different, however, this icy horror tale could be the ticket.—BRYAN



PC

The Sims 3

> STYLE 1-PLAYER SIMULATION > PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS > DEVELOPER THE SIMS STUDIO
> RELEASE JUNE 2 > ESRB T

LIVING IN LAYERS

In the nine years since the original Sims released, the franchise has been the subject of various sequels, spin-offs, and expansions. After all of those iterations and evolutions, I am amazed that The Sims 3 holds the same magnetic charm for me as its predecessors. While the basic concept of guiding a virtual person through the trials and triumphs of everyday life remains unchanged, the nuances have reached new highs in this installment. If you think this series is still about eating and

sleeping while trying not to pee yourself, you need to see the strides The Sims 3 makes.

The meters representing your Sims' basic needs are still present, but they are no longer the main factor driving your decisions. They drain slower and fill faster, which shifts your attention away from constant mood-juggling and allows you to more time to explore more rewarding pursuits. Your moment-to-moment play is driven by a series of clever aspirations that provide a steady stream of option activities, which make the whole world feel more hospitable and rewarding.

Take a few days to write a novel, and you'll find it in the local library for all to read. Head to the gym for a workout, and you'll see an improvement in your physique.

Your goals can be as immediate as getting a kiss from your significant other, and as long-term as maxing out your career track. Practically everything that happens, both good and bad, manifests as a passive modifier to your mood that serves as an excellent incentive to fulfill wishes and avoid mishaps. This emphasis on little things in life gives rise to even more of the surprising moments, hilarious social interactions, and spectacular failures that make The Sims so entertaining.

I can't even list all of the other familiar elements

of the series that have seen an increase in depth. Raising a child, getting promoted, and building relationships all have compelling new facets, but the object customization has come the furthest. Almost every surface of the world — from your car to your upholstery — can be modified to display the exact colors and patterns you want. You can even share your designs with other users online, though the usefulness of that feature will depend more on the community than the game itself. However, if you're not interested in getting too involved with designing your Sims' styles, the game's pre-loaded options should be more than enough.

The only main feature of the game that leaves me conflicted is the focus on the open neighborhood. Maybe EA just wanted to leave some room for the inevitable expansion packs, but the world outside of your front door feels somewhat incomplete. You can walk or drive anywhere in town, but the destinations don't function much differently than previous installments — you just have travel time instead of load time. Going out isn't even that enticing; Sims' wishes give them occasional reasons to leave the house, but you can still cover most of your bases in the comfort of your own living room. Staying home isn't necessarily a bad thing, though, since the game's expansive content ensures that you never get stir crazy.

I won't pretend that The Sims 3 will make a believer out of those who didn't enjoy the previous games. You're still queuing up actions for fake people in a digital dollhouse. Even with that ostensibly simple premise, the development team has crafted a remarkably layered simulation that feels like what The Sims has been trying to be from the beginning — **JOE**

TIME OF YOUR LIFE

Everyone's experience with The Sims 3 will be different. To give you a taste of the possibilities, here is how I spent the first 10 hours with one of several Sims I made.

HOUR 1

Character creation My Sim looks like some sort of futuristic loser bike messenger. His house is full of budget furniture and unreliable appliances.

HOUR 2

Job hunting In order to fulfill my lifetime wish of becoming an astronaut, I walk to the military base and begin a career at the bottom rung — a latrine scrubber.

HOUR 5

Social ladder After making friends with co-workers and building up my athletics, I've gotten a few promotions and purchased much nicer appliances.

HOUR 6

Love interest Tired of living alone, I create a new citizen and moved her in next door. I immediately visit her at all hours of the day and night in an attempt to flirt. She is not impressed.

HOUR 10

C'mon, baby. I finally manage to, uh, "seal the deal" with the neighbor lady. Then we get married, and our wedding party is a total failure in which everyone is bored and leaves early. Maybe they didn't like the human zoo on my front lawn.

HOUR 10

The top. I finally become an astronaut. I also throw a birthday party for my newborn baby, who grows into a toddler in need of potty training and walking lessons. My house begins to resemble a ridiculous pimp mansion.



Second Opinion 9.5

My relationship with The Sims has always been sort of like a junior high romance. I get hot about the games for several weeks and we have a lot of giggly fun while spending way too much time together. Then, almost at the drop of a hat, things turn cold and I lose interest. Maybe The Sims is finally ready for a long-term relationship, because this game has reached a happy balance, because I never felt like I was battling just to keep my sim content. Lifetime goals, like going out on the town or getting your first kiss, give purpose to my daily grind, and lead to promotional bonuses that last for hours. I also loved how I could give my sims general directions at work, which led to promotions and new skills, so even when they weren't on the screen, I didn't feel like my time was wasted. As always this series is hilarious, insane characters flip out randomly, and evil characters can do even the most mundane tasks in malevolent ways (wash hands with evil soap? That's crazy). The best part of this game might be just watching how all the little creatures in this digital ant farm interact with each other. Few games can pull this off, but The Sims 3 is almost as good when you're not playing. —**BEN**



NINTENDO DS

Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor

> STYLE 1-PLAYER STRATEGY/RPG > PUBLISHER ATLUS > DEVELOPER ATLUS
> RELEASE JUNE 23 > ESRB T

FIENDISH FUN

A spin-off is not always a good idea. Just because a franchise is successful in one genre doesn't mean that its concepts will transfer over to another—but Devil Survivor pulls it off. The hallmarks of the Shin Megami Tensei role-playing games, like demon fusion and a macabre story, make a smooth transition into the world of grid-based encounters and strategic combat.

Devil Survivor works well because it plays to the series' strengths. Rather than present another “go here, hit this” tactics experience, the game uses slices of traditional turn-based battles to resolve clashes on the field. Each of your units is an entire party—comprised of one hero character and two demons—and each attack is a round of combat in which you can cast spells and use special abilities. Victory ultimately rests in your ability to exploit enemy weaknesses to gain the upper hand, which means the demons you assign to each character is a crucial part of your strategy.

Administrative busywork; the me I spent obtaining new skills and fusing demons was almost equal to the time I spent in combat. These addictive sub-systems feed

into the gameplay perfectly, so even when I was grinding to beat a tough fight (which happened often), I was still having a good time. Even the story is compelling: the tale of the heroes’ efforts to prevent an impending catastrophe in Tokyo never feels like a cheap excuse to ferry you from one fight to the next.

While combat is usually entertaining, it suffers from one major problem: Chance plays an inordinately large role. The enemies don’t attack with any degree of intelligence, so they just swap your party members randomly. Sometimes the works in your favor, but it also means that you can get blindsided if one of your units takes an unlucky hit. Thankfully, the ability to freely engage in skirmish battles means that you can eventually just steamroll through trouble spots after gaining a few levels.

Developing and executing strategies would feel more significant if the enemies’ behavior was consistent, but Devil Survivor still comes together as a clever blend of turn-based RPG conventions. Even if you’ve never played a Shin Megami Tensei title before, the darkly intriguing premise and unique gameplay make this an excellent place to start.—JOE



BOTTOM LINE **8**

Concept: A hybrid of grid-based strategy and traditional RPG battles, plus a lot of demons.

Graphics: The monster art is cool, but the battle sprites and backgrounds are nothing special.

Sound: I hope you like the two main tracks, because you’ll hear them constantly.

Playability: All of the main functions are well-explained and introduced at a good pace, so you’ll rarely feel lost.

Entertainment: Plenty of depth and a wealth of content will have you looking forward to your next battle.

Replay Value: Moderate.

Second Opinion

Devil Survivor is a role-playing game at heart, with generous sprinklings of tactics, monster-raising, and Japanophile enthusiasm. The sojourn through Tokyo’s youth culture hotspots is fun if you’re on the references, but it’s the well-paced and often difficult battles that win my praise. Even when the conflicts are too devastating, there are free battles to help boost your abilities. Collecting and combining demons is handled through a well-managed and accessible system of menus, and new features within the upgrade system show up gradually. The characters fall into familiar anime archetypes, but the story itself is original and even engrossing at times, with its interplay of religious themes of prophecy and fate. Devil Survivor doesn’t have a lot of features you haven’t seen before, but the way it melds recognizable elements makes for a surprisingly enjoyable play.—MILLER

NINTENDO DS

Flower, Sun, and Rain

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ADVENTURE > PUBLISHER XSEED > DEVELOPER GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE / H.A.N.D.
> RELEASE JUNE 29 > ESRB T



SUFFERING FOR ART

What are you willing to sacrifice for the sake of style?

Unless your answer is “everything,” do not play Flower, Sun, and Rain. From the studio that developed Killer 7 and No More Heroes, the plodding mystery hides its intriguing story behind an impenetrable barrier of stale mechanics and repetitive tasks that practically beg you to stop playing.

To call this an adventure game is a stretch—it’s mainly just walking. You walk in all kinds of not-so-exciting places—around a hotel, down the road, and back in the direction you just came from. Treading these meandering miles is made even worse by the game’s refusal to provide direction; you occasionally

trapse around for 30 minutes or more because no one tells you where to go or what to do. Even if you know your objective, you never get there without a solid five minutes of transit time—especially late in the game.

Between hikes, the pockets of conversation and puzzle solving only deliver fleeting distraction. In theory, protagonist Sumio Mondo is unraveling the secrets of a secluded island. In reality, he is performing fetch quests with absurd amounts of backtracking and obtuse dialogue. Eventually some loafabout throws a puzzle at you, but you won’t even break a sweat. These problems are pathetically easy; you’re primarily just regurgitating numbers from an in-game guidebook.

The one saving grace of Flower, Sun, and Rain is the story. Despite my frustration with the mechanics, I liked the island’s bizarre characters and abnormal events, especially the idea of trapping them all in a single repeating day. The premise gets even stranger once the plot twists come, but if you play FSR long enough to see them, you’ve made a temble mistake.—JOE

BOTTOM LINE **5.5**

Concept: Solve a mystery in a hotel by walking to lots of places.

Graphics: Pretty blocky, but pulls it off thanks to the stylized art direction.

Sound: The twists on familiar tunes create a great atmosphere.

Playability: Backtracking and fetch quests comprise the majority of your time with the controls.

Entertainment: If you can bully through the awful pacing and structure, the story is neat.

Replay Value: Moderately Low

Second Opinion

7.25

Flower, Sun, and Rain does not come off well in the beginning. The slow pacing, dated graphics, and repetitive structure led me to taking a lot of breaks. But I eventually began to appreciate the strange characters and *Crocodile Dundee* mechanic where you keep reliving the same day that always concludes with a plane exploding in midair. The game endearingly makes fun of its own faults and strange plot, but the ridiculous amount of jogging and fetching is a huge waste of time and really kills the pacing. The end isn’t too out there by Grasshopper standards, but the middle section is really the sweet spot for both gameplay and story.—BRYAN





NINTENDO DS

Lego Battles

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER STRATEGY (3-PLAYER LOCAL) > PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT > DEVELOPER: TT GAMES / HELMET GAMES > RELEASE: JUNE 9TH > ESRB: E

SANS STAR WARS

Forget Star Wars and Batman. True LEGO fans know that minifigs are plenty of fun without flashy licensed characters. At least that's what TT Games is banking on with LEGO Battles. The game succeeds in translating the distinctive characteristics of prominent playsets into unique, fun, and accessible play.

One of the biggest perks of LEGO Battles is the sheer bang you get for your buck. Featuring LEGO Castle, Pirates, and Space, along with a mishmash of other themes and situations, the game boasts six story modes (topping off at 70 levels), collectibles, free play, and multi-card functionality for you and two friends. The result is a long and surprisingly fulfilling game experience.

There isn't much of a story to follow, but diversity between playsets keeps things interesting. When playing as knights your task is to defend your kingdom from a skeleton army, forming an alliance with dwarfs along the way. Pirates take to the seas, forging smaller skirmishes for large battles on open water.

LEGO Battles is extremely easy to control and play, abolishing the learning curve

usually associated with RTS titles. The pace perfectly eases players into the practice of commanding troops, managing resources, and expanding strongholds. Gameplay progresses in an encouraging manner as well. When you begin the Castle campaign, your troops are comprised of basic guardmen. The next level introduces a knight on horseback, the next an archer, and eventually you are using catapults and cannons. The enemies also diversify as you progress, which should present a challenge... but more often than not it doesn't.

Many layers of strategy are integrated into play, but you are rarely forced to use them. Why take the time to map patrol patterns for each individual minifig when you could instead harvest early and then rely on overwhelming numbers? You won't often lose. That's the biggest flaw of the game; LEGO Battles won't offer the slightest challenge to an avid RTS fan. But overall I can't complain too much; I had fun, got in a few laughs, and kept coming back for more. Sometimes that's enough. —MEAGAN



BOTTOM LINE **7.5**

> Concept: Lose the license and return LEGO to its roots

> Graphics: The true gels are the shiny cutscenes. The in-game graphics are solid, but less memorable

> Sound: Surprisingly dramatic. Perhaps a bit too much for a LEGO game

> Playability: Extremely accessible for those new to strategy titles, but lacks a challenge for experienced RTS fans

> Entertainment: Good, clean fun—it's a bit repetitive after 70 levels

> Replay Value: Moderate

Second Opinion **4**

It's not 1994 anymore, and the first one is no longer the rage in real-time strategy. Even if it were, this shoddy by-the-numbers RTS wouldn't measure up. The controls are an inedible mess; there is no shortcut for attack-move commands and targeting a specific enemy unit is difficult on this tiny DS screen, meaning that your best bet for combat is to give a short move command and hope your troops pick useful targets on their own. This fails even harder than previous attempts at RTS on the DS, and that's no easy task. —ADAM

Rock Band Unplugged

> STYLE: 1-PLAYER MUSIC > PUBLISHER: MTV GAMES > DEVELOPER: BACKBONE ENTERTAINMENT/AMERICA

> RELEASE: JUNE 9 > ESRB: T



BOTTOM LINE **8**

> Concept: The gameplay design of Harmonix's underground Frequency and Amplitude, the Rock Band franchise

> Graphics: Impressive—features detailed and crisp bandster models and cool video effects

> Sound: The UMD might be in decline, but it's perfect for new CD-quality soundtracks, which are great for a full-band, one-player format

> Playability: Harmonix's greatest hits. The perfect way to incorporate full-band, one-player mode

> Entertainment: A game that fails to live up to its potential due to a poor (by franchise standards) tracklist and repetitive career mode

> Replay Value: High

Second Opinion **8.25**

I should confess up front that I got hooked on beat-matching games because of Frequency and Amplitude. With that in mind, it's not hard for me to find a lot to love in Unplugged. Rapid-fire track switching adds a singular level of challenge that easily makes up for the lack of a dedicated guitar peripheral. Increased difficulty levels add that addictive curve that keeps you coming back to improve, and perfecting a song on expert is as hard as it is on the console game. We've been promised downloadable songs on the PSP, which is awesome. However, it's not enough to make up for the huge number of recycled songs from other music games or how frequently those songs get repeated as you play through the career mode. This frustrates me the most because of how much I love the gameplay package; the game deserves a dedicated soundtrack of new tunes. Even with an overly familiar lineup of music, this is the best portable music game on the market. —MILLER



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CHARTS

An In-Depth Listing Of The Best Selling Games

TOP 20

Listings Based Upon NPD Data For April 2009 Based On Units Sold

1 WII FIT (WII)



What if Wii Fit had been made in the '80s? It would probably have used the stupid Power Pad, which means you'd be on your knees most of the time giving your arms a workout. The game also would have recommended you work out in parachute pants to a soundtrack featuring Kenny Loggins. Yeah, it never would have worked; the human race just wasn't created to be fit.

2 POKÉMON PLATINUM (DS)



What if Pokémons had been created in the 1800s? People would have captured real animals and fought beside them in battle. It would have been like Beestmaster, Holy Ho-ho! That would have been amazing! The ancient Romans might have done something similar to this in their gladiatorial exhibitions. Don't worry, kids, afterwards everyone still went safely back in their Pokéballs. Except back then they were called coffins.

3 MARIO KART WII (WII)



What if this kind of game had been made several decades ago? We could have used small wooden cars and raced them around a wooden course. The track would have needed to be electrified in some way, and little grooves would have had to be cut into the track so the cars didn't fall off. This sounds really inventive. We've decided to call this Slot Cars Racing, because to start the race you'd pull a giant lever like a slot machine.

4 WII PLAY (WII)



What if this kind of game had been made any time before the television was invented? We suppose you could use some kind of ball-like device and hit it back, simulating table tennis. You could throw rocks at birds, because, of course, guns weren't invented until Doom. However, you'd probably have to go outside and do the running yourself. Wow, that sounds terrible. Thank goodness Edison invented the TV.

5 GODFATHER II (360)



What if this game had been made back in the '50s? You and your friends could pretend to be a part of this underground organization that did bad things for people. You could even open real stores and pretend that you were the mob boss. Your mom may have thought mobsters would play along and give you protection money. Yeah, that would be fun, except there wouldn't be any controller to keep away from your brother.

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System	Score	Release
1	Wii Fit	5	Wii	8	05-08
2	Pokémon Platinum	2	DS	8.5	03-09
3	Mario Kart Wii	9	Wii	8.5	04-08
4	Wii Play	8	Wii	7	02-07
5	The Godfather II	N/A	360	5.5	04-09
6	Resident Evil 5	1	360	9.5	03-09
7	New Super Mario Bros.	16	DS	9.25	05-06
8	Mario Kart DS	N/A	DS	8.5	11-05
9	Guitar Hero Aerosmith	N/A	360	8	06-08
10	The Godfather II	N/A	PS3	5.5	04-09
11	Guitar Hero Metallica	11	360	8.75	03-09
12	Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	N/A	DS	4	01-08
13	Rhythm Heaven	N/A	DS	7.5	03-09
14	MLB '09: The Show	6	PS3	9	03-09
15	Professor Layton and the Curious Village	17	DS	7.5	02-08
16	Resident Evil 5	4	PS3	9.5	03-09
17	Call of Duty: World at War	12	360	8.75	11-08
18	Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	N/A	DS	9.25	03-09
19	Guitar Hero Metallica	N/A	PS2	8.75	04-09
20	Major League Baseball 2K9	10	360	7.25	03-09

Source: The NPD Group/NPD Handset 27/RS3

TOP 10 JAPAN

Rank Title

Rank	Title	System
1	Monster Hunter G	Wii
2	Pokémon Fushigi No Dungeon: Sora No Tankentai	DS
3	Killzone 2	PS3
4	Zettai Zeitsumi Toshi 3	PSP
5	Monster Hunter Portable 2nd G	PSP
6	DeathSmiles	360
7	Sengoku Basara: Battle Heroes	PSP
8	Mario & Luigi RPG 3	DS
9	Wii Fit	Wii
10	H.A.W.X.	360



TOP 10 PC

Rank Title

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	System
1	Red Faction: Guerrilla	N/A	Multi
2	The Sims 3	N/A	PC
3	Punch-Out!!	N/A	Wii
4	Infamous	1	PS3
5	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	N/A	Multi
6	Little King's Story	N/A	Wii
7	Empire: Total War	2	PC
8	Rock Band Unplugged	N/A	PSP
9	Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor	N/A	DS
10	Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	4	DS



TOP 10 PSP

Rank Title

Rank	Title	L. Mo.	Price
1	World Of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King	2	\$35
2	The Sims 2 Double Deluxe	3	\$20
3	World Of Warcraft: Battle Chest	5	\$36
4	Company Of Heroes: Tales Of Valor	N/A	\$29
5	Empire: Total War	1	\$50
6	World Of Warcraft	6	\$20
7	Left 4 Dead	N/A	\$30
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REVIEWS ARCHIVE



X-Men Origins: Wolverine - PlayStation 3 - Jun-09

H.A.W.X.

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Apr-09

Major League Baseball 2K9
Halo Wars

7.25

Apr-09

Company of Heroes

Tales of Valor

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Last Remnant, The

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Major Minor's Majestic March

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Cyber Warhead

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Dredmor

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Left 4 Dead

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New Play Control

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MLB Front Office Manager

6.5 Jan-09

MLB Major League Baseball 2K9

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Medieval Times: The Return of the King

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Ocean Chase: Bikini

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Mirro's Edge

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Samurai Squad

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MLB Front Office Manager

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Punch-Out!

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Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party

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Naruto: The Broken Bond

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Ready 2 Rumble Revolution

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X-Men Origins: Wolverine

Tearing It Up Mutant-Style



By Dan Vondrak, project lead at Raven Software

When we were planning the combat system for Wolverine, one of our key focuses was building a system that allowed the player lots of options. We wanted to make sure that no matter what state you were in, the buttons on your controller were going to do something cool. What this means is the more you're willing to experiment, the more you will get out of the game.

HEAVY AUTO-FINISHERS

One of the great things about working on a Wolverine game is looking through decades of comics to find some really great finishing moves. Our job was finding as many ways as possible to get these moves into the game (and put our own visceral twist on them). The heavy attack has a lot of uses in a bouncy game: upercuts that send enemies into a bounce pain state, charging it sends them airborne, and combining it with light attacks performs the heavy finishers. Using the heavy attack can also result in very powerful context sensitive moves known as Auto-Finishers. When enemies are starting to get low on health you can perform brutal instant kill moves by pressing the heavy attack. These are fast and brutal: sweeping low chopping legs off, double slicing both arms off, punching your fist right through the chest – trust me, use that heavy attack more often in combat. In addition to all the other bonuses, the Auto-Finishers are a great way to feel like Wolverine and get some great cinematic-looking kills.

POP-UP, AIR ATTACKS, AND JUGGLING

You can charge Wolverine's claw attack by holding the heavy button. Once it's fully charged, releasing it results in a powerful pop-up attack that sends enemies (and Wolverine) up into the air. This can be an overlooked move, because there are so many ways to attack on the ground. What I like about the air attacks is the separation you get from the enemies on the ground – you're safe from most attacks up there. To maximize

your time in the air, chain into the quick air attacks that will juggle the enemy and keep a Wolverine airborne, then make sure to finish with either the heavy attack (known affectionately as "Thor's Hammer" around the office after a move from Marvel: Ultimate Alliance) or the Air Grab. I prefer the Air Heavy when I'm in an exterior location with drop offs. It's a quick way to get instant deaths. The kick Wolverine performs sends enemies shooting out like a cannonball.

ACTION FIGURES

To unlock the Wolverine uniforms in the game you must find action figures. You need to collect two action figures for each uniform – but there are actually five of each action figure placed in the game. We wanted to make sure there were lots of chances to find them. Even after you've collected the two you need for a particular uniform, find the other three because they are worth a lot of XP and a little rage.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF GRAB

There's so much you can do with grab in Wolverine. We purposely built in a lot of context-sensitive moves that work off the grab button. We love the idea of Wolverine getting up close and personal with the enemies, and grab is perfect for that.

Grab Attacks – After you've grabbed an enemy, the quick kills are lots of fun (performed by pressing the heavy button) – but if you want to get the most out of a grabbed enemy, soften them up with the grab attacks. Using the normal attack button, you can unleash a long string of quick jabs, then move on to one of the grab finishers.

Grab Slam – One of my personal favorites! Perform a light pop-up (tap the heavy button) to send an enemy just a few feet in the air, then press grab and you'll grab the enemy by the ankle and slam them to the ground. The beauty of this move is that enemies bounce back up after

the grab slam, opening them up for another grab slam or any of the other context-sensitive bounce moves. My personal combo is to grab slam two or three times, then finish them off with the heavy bounce attack (we nicknamed it the "Bruce Lee" during development). Try a grab slam next to a floor spike and see what happens!

Grab and Spin – Similar to the grab slam, but instead of just tapping the grab button, hold it down. You grab the enemy by the legs and spin them round and round, knocking other enemies out of the way, smashing breakables, and maybe clearing a path using the enemy. Then let go of grab to send the enemy flying. I always try to do this with fortids and lots of enemies around so I can knock enemies into the air and impale them on the spikes.

Air Grab – Once you've launched yourself into the air by charging and releasing the heavy attack, you can grab enemies and slam them into the ground, sending nearby enemies on the ground flying back.

ENVIRONMENTAL KILLS

Located all over the levels are environmental kills – fortids, spikes, statues, trees, computer consoles, cement mixers – all kinds of objects you can use to impale, shred, electrocute, and dismember enemies. Use Feral Senses to highlight these objects then either grab an enemy near one, or throw an enemy into one to get the environmental kill.

Something most people don't know is that in addition to looking cool and causing instant death, you actually gain double the rage of a normal kill. If I enter a room with plenty of environmental kills, I'll usually spend my rage performing fury attacks right away, then quickly build it back up using the environmental kills. Some tougher enemies need to be beaten down and weakened (shown by a red pulsing outline on the enemy) before you can use the grabbed environmental kills. But you can always use the throw environmental kills right away – no need to weaken them first. Be careful, because the enemies can knock or throw you onto the environmental kills as well, and you'll have to tap yourself off.

EXPERIENCE COUNTS

An easy (and fun) way to get more XP out of each kill is to vary your attacks. Wolverine has a reward system built in that increases the XP for each kill if you use different types of attacks to kill the enemy. So mixing up the attacks between normal, heavy, ground, air, fury and all the rest is effective. Combine that with the "experienced" mutagen and you can gain levels a lot faster.

Mod World

Dragonica Online
dragonica.thqice.com



Final Fight should totally be an MMO. That's what Dragonica developer ICE thought at one point anyway. This free-to-play online title has been active in Korea, China, and Europe for some time, and is being brought here this fall courtesy of THQ.

Big-headed heroes welding oversized weapons as they plow through droves of monsters are Dragonica's bread and butter. Documentary crafting and guild systems are in place, but hectic side-scrolling action is undeniably the main draw. Up to four players at a time can jump into one of the game's dozens of instanced missions, complete with boss fights and rankings on speed and efficiency.



Though it's a full-scale game, Dragonica doesn't cost anything to play. Cosmetic items and boosts like temporary experience potions are available for real money, but the publisher is adamant that players are not disadvantaged in combat or blocked from parts of the game if they elect not to put any money into the system.

This column typically sticks to indie and fan-made projects, but Dragonica is an intriguing enough download that it deserves a look. Keep an eye on the official site for the continuing beta process in the few months until its U.S. launch.



FINAL FANTASY IV REVISITED



One can easily make a case for Final Fantasy IV as the best of the early console RPGs. It has cool characters, lots of airships, and a steady stream of surprises and plot twists to keep gamers enthralled. As we gear up for the upcoming sequel (check out Impulse on page 14 for more on that), it is the perfect opportunity to reminisce about this standout entry in the long-running series. Join us in remembering the great moments – along with some strange ones – as we put together the pieces that made Final Fantasy IV an instant classic.

II V. IV

Some gamers will better recognize Final Fantasy IV by the name Final Fantasy II.

The game was the fourth in the series, but only the second to release outside of Japan; to avoid confusion, the SNES version was called Final Fantasy II in North America. While it seemed like a good idea at the time, it only caused more problems down the road as the series gained popularity. For clarity's sake, fans now usually refer to this game as Final Fantasy IV, since Final Fantasy II is the official name of the title that originally came after the first Final Fantasy in Japan.



SOMETHING'S MISSING

The version of Final Fantasy IV that hit North America on the Super Nintendo was different from what Japanese players experienced. Several features were simplified or even cut for the overseas release. This is most apparent in the characters' combat abilities; Cecil originally had a power that sacrificed HP to damage all enemies, and Rosa could pray, which had a chance to restore a small amount of life to the party. Thankfully, these abilities didn't stay on the cutting room floor – later releases of the game on other consoles saw them reinstated.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

For most of the game, Cecil and company try to stop Golbez, an evil wizard amassing power in order to control the world. In a late-game revelation, however, we learn that Cecil and Golbez are brothers. Not only that – they aren't even from Earth. They belong to a race called the Lunarians (as does FuSoYa), who come from the planet's second moon. At the end of the game, Golbez stays with FuSoYa on the moon, while Cecil returns to Earth with his friends.



DARK KNIGHT REDEEMED

One of the best scenes in the game has Cecil ascending a mountain in order to prove his worth and leave his tainted past behind. In a room full of reflective crystals, Cecil becomes a paladin and is forced to face the specter of his old self as a dark knight. In addition to being cool in concept, this brief battle also has a twist: In order to win, players need only defend against the dark knight's brutal assault. If you attack him back, the fight will carry on indefinitely or until Cecil's healing options are exhausted and he dies. Matching aggression with aggression is apparently not the path for an honorable paladin.



SO MUCH DEATH

These days, role-playing games have developed graceful ways to move certain party members out of the rotation if necessary. Final Fantasy IV just kills them off to make room for new blood. Of course, these "deaths" rarely stick, but you are led to believe that almost all of your allies have kicked the bucket at some point. Cid, Edward, Kain, Palom, Porom, Rydia, and Yang all have close calls. Unfortunately, Tellah experiences the real thing.



USING YOUR HEAD

A good fight is more than just exchanging blows, and Final Fantasy IV has several noteworthy monsters that put a new spin on the standard combat scenario. The Demon Wall leaves players limited time to defeat it before it crushes the party, Trap Doors look like normal doors (except they attack when you go through), and Behemoths counter every attack with high-level spells. Our favorite unique encounter is the battle against the queen of the summoned monsters, Asura. Normal strategies won't work against her, since she casts Cure faster than you can take away her health. Instead, you need to cast Wall on her, which reflects all magic cast on one target. The spell is normally used on your party to keep enemies from hitting you with spells, but when you cast it on Asura, all of her Cure magic bounces back and heals your party. After that, you're free to wail on her with physical attacks.

UP IN THE SKY

Gamers loved the airship in the original Final Fantasy, and that fact wasn't lost on the developers. Final Fantasy IV makes airships a central part of the story in the form of the military fleet called The Red Wings, and it gives players a variety of airborne options for transportation. The first vehicle you obtain is a hovercraft, and over the course of the game you gain two airships (each of which undergo modifications), black chocobos that carry you over sea and land, and even a space ship that flies to the moon. At least Cecil and his friends know how to ride in style.



TURN OF PHRASE

Filled with grief and rage over the death of his daughter, Tellah confronts Edward, who he believes is responsible for the tragedy. When they finally come face to face, what does Tellah shout as he is about to exact vengeance? "You spoony bard!" This bizarre phrase is easily one of the most memorable lines in the game, and it became so iconic that it was kept intact when the entire script was retranslated for new versions of the game. What began as wonky localization has become an indelible part of gaming history.

AND YOU ARE?

Unfortunately, Final Fantasy IV is guilty of a frustrating RPG faux pas: the final boss swap. The game goes to great lengths to establish Golbez as the primary antagonist, and at the end, you learn that some moon-man named Zemus has been pulling the strings instead. As if that weren't bad enough, you don't even get to kill Zemus — Golbez and FuSoYa do. In the final battle, you're stuck fighting yet another surprise villain, Zeromus, who is apparently the essence of malice inside Zemus' soul — or something.



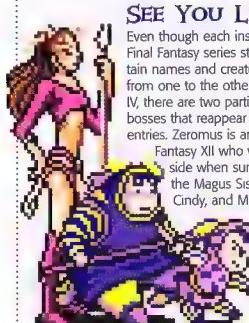
METEO!

As the ultimate black magic, Meteo builds up quite a reputation. It calls down flames from the sky, pummeling foes for massive damage. Tellah is on a quest to learn this powerful spell in order to kill Golbez, but since he doesn't have enough MP to cast it, he can only use the spell in one story battle before dying. Players finally get access to the legendary attack when FuSoYa joins the party, and again when Rydia advances to level 55...but its high MP cost means that Flare is usually a better alternative. Presumably, Meteo was intended to be "Meteor," but the game's five-character limit on spell names forced the abbreviation.



SEE YOU LATER

Even though each installment of the Final Fantasy series stands alone, certain names and creatures carry over from one to the other. In Final Fantasy IV, there are two particularly noteworthy bosses that reappear as allies in later entries. Zeromus is an Esper in Final Fantasy XII who will fight by your side when summoned. Similarly, the Magus Sisters (Sandy, Cindy, and Mindy) are available as secret Aeons in Final Fantasy X.



FF IV AWARDS



Lamest Ally:
Edward

Edward attacks with a harp, has a "sing" move that rarely works, and spends important battles hiding from enemies. If only he could have died instead of Tellah...



Most Improved:
Rydia

Rydia starts the adventure as a kid with potential, but not much power. When she rejoins the group later as a young lady, she can destroy groups of enemies with powerful black magic and summons.



Most Impressive Beard: FuSoYa

Never mind his awesome arcane might — FuSoYa's best feature is his flowing, white beard. The best part is that when he gets knocked out, he basically slumps into a huge pile of hair. Runner-Up: Cid.



Strangest Attack:
Kain

Some party members cast magic, summon beasts, or throw ninja stars. Kain jumps. He doesn't just bunny-hop, either; he can stay in the air for a good 30 seconds before landing on his enemy. Is that really better than just using your spear?



Worst Teamwork:
The Four Fiends

Each of the four elemental fiends is a considerable challenge alone. If Milon, Cagnazzo, Valvulus, and Rubicund were to team up, they would wipe the floor with Cecil. Instead, they take the kung-fu movie approach, attacking individually and over time.



SEGA GENESIS

CYBORG JUSTICE

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION > PUBLISHER SEGA > DEVELOPER NOVOTRADE > RELEASE 1993

J udging by the cyborg definition of justice, we're in for one bleak future when robots inevitably take over. *Cyborg Justice* improves on the old beat-'em-up formula by allowing custom characters. Players choose from different leg, torso, and arm parts, which offer unique special attacks and affect speed and strength. A cybernetic alter ego is used to traverse the bland, repetitive levels of the game in a strange sort of robo-strut. With an impressive number of moves, the standout feature of *Cyborg Justice* is the combat, especially the ability to dismantle your robot enemies during battle. Grab a foe's arm, pull it off with a satisfying pop, then throw it back at them for extra damage. Once armless, you can pull an enemy's torso off and absorb its energy. If you're particularly cruel, you can even reassemble your broken enemies back to working order, only to once again kick them in the metallic groin until they explode. The game may be frustrating and repetitive, but with moves like that, it's still fun.



NINTENDO 64

SPACE STATION SILICON VALLEY

> STYLE 1-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER TAKE 2 INTERACTIVE > DEVELOPER DMA DESIGN > RELEASE 1998

D on't adjust your set after you see *Space Station Silicon Valley* in action – it really looks that bad. On the outside, this goofy puzzle-platformer is slow, ugly, and boring. Spend some time with the game and it reveals itself as smart, deep, and devilishly challenging. You take control of lazy Danger Dan and his remote-controlled robot partner Evo. The klutzy duo receives cash to prevent a futuristic zoo from colliding with Earth. DMA Design, now known as Rockstar North (of *Grand Theft Auto* fame), developed *Space Station Silicon Valley*. Instead of劫crajiing automobiles, however, you'll animal-jack 40 unique robot creatures, including missile-shooting dogs and spring-jumping sheep. You can use these hapless automatons to activate switches, float to far-off cliffs, or complete other various mini-puzzles in the 30-plus levels. If you die once, though, expect a frustrating restart. Even so, individual stages are entertaining enough to pull you back in after a failure. Push past the visuals, and some surprisingly fun ideas come through.

THEN
6.5

NES

CHIP 'N DALE: RESCUE RANGERS

> STYLE 1 OR 2-PLAYER ACTION/PLATFORM > PUBLISHER CAPCOM > DEVELOPER CAPCOM > RELEASE 1990

N othing entrances little kids like cartoons, except for video games based on those cartoons. *Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers* remains a memorable game thanks to creative level design and an impressive two-player co-op mode. The gameplay is also fun; using the plethora of boxes that litter every stage as weapons works well, and hiding inside them is more effective than it ever was for Solid Snake. The boss battles evoke nostalgia as well as laughter thanks to a rubber ball as a weapon, which upon throwing is just as likely to hit and stun you or your partner as it is your enemy. Unfortunately, the difficulty level cripples the experience. While the levels are as creative as they are hazardous (broken power lines and lit stovetops are presented as traversable platforms, not to mention bar and casino stages), they are far too long. Having to start over from the beginning makes things all the more maddening. There aren't enough continues in the world to rescue players from frustration, no matter how old they are.

THEN
N/A

ONLINE

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UNLIMITED LAUNCH: JUN. 15

PRIMED FOR THE SPOTLIGHT

On the eve of *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, we sat down and chatted with Peter Cullen, the voice of Optimus Prime.



Rock 'N' Roll All Night

The Guitar Hero train just won't stop chugging. Read more about *Guitar Hero 5* in our interview with Brian Bright, project director at Neversoft.

One Ring To Rule The Wii

If you can't get enough, check out this interview with Steve Pritchard, development director at Headstrong Games, which is making the Wii-exclusive *Aragorn's Quest*.

Ratcheting Up The Action

Insomniac Game shares more info about *Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack In Time* in this interview with creative director Brian Allgeier.



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GAME OVER

Congratulations!! We Hope You Try 'Master' Level. See You Again.

VIDEO GAME TRIVIA

Strap those helmets on tight, gamers! Under direct orders from Editor-In-Chief Andy McNamara, you must infiltrate Game Over, eliminate all wrong answers and rescue all correct ones. Perform your duties well and a special decoration awaits you. If you don't like your award, go cry to mommy! What are you waiting for? Move it! Move it!

1 What fighting game on Dreamcast features a Gypsy fortune-teller named Rouge? She specializes in long-range flame attacks.

- A. Dead or Alive 2
- B. Power Stone
- C. Soul Calibur
- D. Street Fighter Alpha 3

2 Race Driver 2006 on PSP features 15 different motorsports, but we can't remember which one of these events is actually in the game...

- A. Ice Racing
- B. Reverse Racing
- C. Beach Racing
- D. Powerboat Racing



3 Before Black & White and Fable, Peter Molyneux designed what 1997 PC real-time strategy title that proudly proclaims "EVIL IS GOOD" on the box?

- A. Myth: the Fallen Lords
- B. Total Annihilation
- C. Dungeon Keeper
- D. Age of Empires

4 This screen is taken from what exclusive Sega Genesis game, starring a green "orbot" which seeks to restore peace on Earth in the year 2049?

- A. B.O.B.
- B. Vectorman
- C. Cybernator
- D. Orbots In Disguise



5 Ten years before the events of Final Fantasy X, who defeated Sin, the beast that threatens the world of Spira?

- A. Cobb
- B. Braska
- C. Ohalland
- D. Torell

6 Rhythm Heaven is a funky DS title that has you flicking and tapping your stylus to rhythms, but which of these zany events does NOT appear in the game?

- A. Monkey see, monkey do! Clap and jump in succession with other monkeys.
- B. Stomp the soil beneath you to eject beets from the ground as a farmer collecting his crops.
- C. Catch, shake, and toss love potions to other scientists – don't break the flasks!
- D. Hit towering fly balls in a homerun derby as a baseball player. Touch 'em all!

7 Clue, the board game, can be downloaded on Xbox Live Arcade for 800 Microsoft Points. Pssst... it's Colonel Mustard with the wrench in the billiard room!

- A. True
- B. False

8 This scrambled image is from what NES title that has you searching for your pet frog in an underground world? The things we do for our pets...

- A. Frog Bog
- B. Blaster Master
- C. Zanac
- D. Journey To The Center Of The Rabbit



9 Who is the only Super Smash Bros. Brawl character without a "home" stage that represents his or her game universe?

- A. Sonic
- B. Sheik
- C. R.O.B.
- D. Wolf

10 The answer is B. Just kidding! It's C, which means it's D. Confused yet?

- A. B
- B. D
- C. A
- D. C

BREAKDOWN

3.24 billion is the amount Konami earned in its fiscal year – a record for the company, thanks to solid sales from Metal Gear Solid 4 and Pro Evolution Soccer.

33 million dollars is the amount that Warner Bros. recently bid to buy Midway.

1.03 billion was Sony's net loss for the fiscal year, its first net loss in 14 years.

2.8 billion was Nintendo's net profit for the fiscal year, an increase of 8.5 percent from last year.

1 is the number of Wii Remotes Matt busted out of frustration playing Little King's Story. That boss really handed it to him.

★ Trivia Score & Rank ★



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Wii



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